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GOKHALE INSTITUTE OF POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

PUBLICATION NO. 11

The Aborigines—"So-called"—And Their Future

50300

By

G. S. Ghurye, Ph.D. (Cantab.)

Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology,
Bombay University

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Foreword

This publication of the Institute stands on a somewhat different footing from its predecessors. All the publications issued by the Institute so far, have been written by workers or students connected with the Institute and have embodied results of investigation or research carried out under the guidance of its Director. Dr. Ghurye's work does not fall within this category. It is an independent piece of work which he was kind enough to offer for inclusion in the series of publications of the Institute. The Institute readily agreed to his suggestion because of the importance of what Dr. Ghurye had to say on this vexed question, and also because it raised issues and dealt with problems which, in other contexts, were being studied at the Institute.

Dr. Ghurye writes essentially as a sociologist. The problem he tackles has, however, very important politico-economic aspects. This is hardly surprising as it is fundamentally the result of contact between peoples with widely different economic techniques. The particular problem of the aborigines in India lies at one extreme of the body of problems created by the British occupation and exploitation of India. The history of the occupation by the British of region after region of India runs to a somewhat monotonous pattern. In this history, alliance, protectorate, pacificatory expeditions and occupation follow each other in due course. The initial contact was usually established at the political end, whether for economic or for political aims; the later economic penetration was universal whatever the nature of the political authority obtained over the particular region. The immediate and palpable results of economic exploitation, however, differed from tract to tract and from one economic activity to another according to the worth of exploitable resources contained within the region, or the directness of the impact on the activity. Thus in the history of indigo cultivation in Bengal in the first half of the 19th century or that of tea plantations later, or in the collapse of certain handicrafts, the relation between the economic results and the seizure of political power by the British was obvious to all. In other instances where

the developments were not equally arresting, the connection between the two was not as apparent. This was particularly so in the case of what might be called the "central aboriginal belt." The geographical limits of this belt have been largely determined by the desirability and possibility of exploitation and settlement. The extent of the area in which aboriginal tribes are found comparatively unaffected by outside contact has depended not only on the comparative inaccessibility of the regions inhabited by them, but also on the comparative valuelessness from the point of view of exploitation by the British, of the resources contained within those regions. The opening up of Assam might, in this connection, be contrasted with that of Chota Nagpur. The fact that economic pressure was neither considerable nor direct in some regions, however, makes little difference to the nature of the primary phenomenon. Even in these regions, outside contacts were brought about as a result mainly of the attempts at the establishment of the police and the judiciary, the guaranteeing of the excise revenue, the guarding of forests, the settlement of land, the opening of the country to trade, etc. And all these were parts of the process of the occupation and exploitation of the country by the British. It is necessary in this manner to insist on political contact and economic exploitation not only because they were chronologically prior, but also because they led to a very general modification of social life and social outlook.¹ It is not necessary to labour the point that a change in economic habits and way of life necessarily leads to a general change in all other directions. The intimate connection of social practices and religious rituals with economic life is well known, and if the balance of the one is disturbed the other cannot remain unimpaired.²

1 Cf. the following:

"The first lease of the Cheyla Poonjee orange groves was granted, on the 15th of February 1830, to Mr. Inglis for fifteen years, by the Wahadadars, who, no doubt, at that time were specially empowered by the people to grant that lease in return for a loan of 3,000 Rupees, which had been advanced by Mr. Inglis to the whole Cheyla community to enable them to pay a fine of 4,000 Rupees, which had been imposed upon their district by the Governor General's Agent."—W. J. Allen: "Report on the Administration of the Cossyah and Jyntiah Hill Territory," Para 333 (1853).

The whole course of events had also, it should be noticed, the result of substantially increasing the power of the Wahadadars and undermining an originally democratic system.

2 Dr. Hutton pointed out that the introduction of child marriage in certain tribes might itself be due to the ease with which bridal money can be got together in a money economy as compared with a barter economy. Cf. Dr. J. H. Hutton, "Primitive Tribes," in "Modern India and the West," Ed. L. S. S. O'Malley (1941).

In the writings of many Englishmen the problems of contact of the aborigines with the outside world are treated as if they were essentially the result of the impinging of Hindu society on the preserves of the aborigines. This is an entirely wrong view of the problem. The establishment of British rule has brought about a revolution in the nature and extent of the contact of the Hindu with the aborigine. The primary phenomenon in recent history is the extension of British dominion. The Indian features are mere corollaries thereof serving, at a secondary level, the main purpose of the primary phenomenon. This will be the clearer if one studies developments in areas outside India opened up and primarily exploited by Europeans as, for example, in East Africa or in South-East Asia. The Indian trader or money-lender in these tracts appears as a secondary growth in the same manner as in the Indian aboriginal areas. Whether in the one case or the other, it is the exploitation of the country by the new methods that gives the peculiar turn to the results of the contact between the inhabitants of the region and the outside world; and the problem of the Indian aborigines is thus seen to be only one of many such, created by the expansion of the white races and the spread of the Industrial Revolution all over the world.

This will be further emphasized by observing that the new type of money-lender, for example, is, as Dr. Ghurye points out, not the peculiar product of conditions in the aboriginal tract. The spread of the non-indigenous money-lender is, indeed, a peculiar feature of Indian economic history in the 19th century, whose connection with British occupation and the British judicial system cannot be disputed. For example, in the Maratha country, which flanks the central aboriginal belt, the exploitation of different strata of the population by Marwari and Pathan money-lenders has been notorious. With the transition to money economy and the establishment of novel concepts regarding land rights and judicial procedure, the more enterprising money-lenders, who did not belong to the same society as the debtors and whose operations were, therefore, not restrained by pressure of social opinion, had peculiar opportunities. And, within the country, there were naturally found migrating classes who were keen to sense these opportunities, and sedulous in exploiting them. Whether

in the aboriginal or non-aboriginal tracts the resulting phenomenon was in origin and in results of the same type, and had little to do with identity or difference in religion and culture.

It is interesting to observe how the ideas of Europeans on the subject of contacts between peoples have gradually undergone a change in recent times. The two extremes are represented by the idea of a complete "open door" i. e. no restriction or regulation of contact, on the one hand, to the idea of the "National Park" i.e., complete isolation, on the other. The National Park idea is by no means a new one. The Japanese, for example, after some experience of contact with the Whites decided to convert their islands into an isolated National preserve and they persisted in their resolve over a long period until the Americans, by force of superior arms, compelled them to change it. Accepting an open door and freedom of intercourse, the Japanese went on faithfully to copy the objectives and methods of their teachers with the result that they find themselves in disgrace with them today for following exactly the opposite line of conduct. These changes of views and of emphasis in the political sphere can be matched by development of thought in other spheres also. In the economic sphere, for example, there had always been sharp differences of opinion as between the English and the Americans regarding the type of open door or the extent of isolation, and developments in recent decades have brought about a further measure of change in both of them. It is necessary to point to the obvious in this manner, in order to emphasize the environmental factors which are prone to give bias to all thought on matters of social policy. The peculiar recent concern of English writers with the problem of the Indian aborigines is the result of what was feared to be the impending transfer of political control from British to Indian hands. The English members of Parliament who spoke in the Parliamentary debates on the India Bill on this question and Mr. Elwin both belong, it is necessary to remember, to the same phase of English opinion on the subject. It is likely, on the other hand, that Dr. Ghurye is also partly actuated to write because of his concern at the possibility of the creation, in our midst, of regions of unabsorbable men and resources who

might even be given a hostile bias. The only way, therefore, in which matters could be judged somewhat apart from particular bias, is to consider them as parts of a possible universal policy.

In this connection one often hears of a facile talk regarding science and the scientific method. However, this is one of the instances, where such talk is most obviously misplaced. There are at least two major objections against the use of the term "scientific" in this context. The first relates to the objectivity of the data. As Dr. Ghurye shows, this is specially to be doubted. The impressions of different sets of observers, equally competent, may differ as to the phenomenon observed in a striking manner, depending possibly on personal opinion. To one, a people may appear depressed and without zest of life, to another merely sober and more regular in habits. It seems that even in matters such as the quality of the products of crafts, observers might sharply disagree. It thus becomes difficult to dogmatize, especially about the total effect of a many-sided event like the contact of two peoples. But an even more fundamental objection to talking of a policy based on science is that, while the scientific method may enable you to define the causal relation between events, and perhaps even to predict, though the latter very rarely with any certitude in the social sphere, yet the scientific method by itself yields no social values. That a sexual life like that of the Baigas, as Mr. Elwin describes it, is to be preferred to the state in Hindu society where child marriage is common, is an opinion that might be termed highly just, highly sophisticated or highly perverse, according to the peculiar predilections and prejudices of persons, but neither of these judgments could be called more scientific than the others. Among the social sciences, economics is supposed to have advanced more in scientific rigour than the others. But even economists are today insistent on saying that, say, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, as an end of economic activity, must be taken as externally given, and is not yielded by economic analysis by itself. The anthropologist or the sociologist may argue out of the richness of his experience why certain ends are to be preferred to others. He has no authority, however, to clothe

the results of his personal judgment under the commanding garb of the term "scientific."

Dr. Ghurye has shown that English policy has neither been consistent nor successful in its treatment of the problem during the last century and a half. Whatever the variations in this policy, it did not base itself at any time on complete isolationism. An imperial power could not obviously adopt an isolationist position; for, if the aborigine was to be placed in a "reserve," there was no reason why the Hindu also should not be left alone. English non-official thought also did not advocate a policy of complete isolation. Isolationism, where noticed in this period, was of a modified sort, that which stressed the avoidance of contact with the Indian or the Hindu but not with the European or Christian. The extreme position in this regard is, as pointed out above, a definitely recent development.

It is worth while investigating the implications of this isolationism. It seems opposed to all flux or change in respect, at least, of certain communities. It obviously lays special store by the qualities engendered in them by all freedom from contact. It values these above all possible gains of contact, and in doing this it would prevent any further economic and political development of these communities. The large majority of the peoples it would so isolate are living at standards distinctly lower than those of the surrounding population, and in some cases make an extremely precarious living. Politically the idea of the "park," in itself, involves a permanent state of tutelage and guardianship, exercised by whatever paramount political power that happens to hold sway over the area. It definitely denies the right to the protected people themselves to choose, because it questions their ability to make the choice. It gives no heed to the claims of the larger region or society and would make for fossilization instead of for mutual adjustment through time. It seems to originate in a notion similar to that of White trusteeship; for, it would impose a set of values and a course of behaviour entirely independent of the choice of either one or of both of the two parties to the contact, and would substitute for it the judgment of a third which is not even representative of any larger social order embracing the two

parties. It is a much more extreme policy than that adopted on certain reserves, as that of the Maories or of American Indians. For, in the latter, economic and educational progress is not only not hindered but is welcomed, and only such parts of the older cultural pattern preserved as are consistent with such progress. The isolationist in India realizes that he must take an extreme stand because if contact in any one direction is allowed the resulting effects will be such that the process of assimilation in the not very divergent neighbouring strata will easily be set in motion.

As against the isolationist position, Dr. Ghurye would evidently urge that the antagonism between the aborigines and Hindu society, which the isolationist emphasizes, does not in reality exist. The Hindu society immediately surrounding the aborigines is indeed, he would point out, very akin to it in racial composition and spiritual faith. It is made up very largely of the erstwhile aborigines themselves, now incorporated in the Hindu fold and the process of incorporation is far from being an unmixed evil. Such a process, especially with proper regulation and safeguards, is the only one which holds out any promise for the improvement of the political, economic and social conditions of these backward peoples. The Hindu society is itself in a considerable state of flux and its internal stresses are such as to lead to an improvement generally of the strata now reckoned as the lower among it.

Dr. Ghurye rightly points out that the problem of the "so-called" aborigines is not essentially different from that of other classes in Hindu society who are socially and economically depressed. Governments in India have already accepted, in principle, the responsibility of specially protecting the interests of the backward and the depressed, as is clear from the prevalence of Money-lenders' Acts and legislation restricting alienation of land. Indian public opinion is in this regard much in advance of the pace of governmental action. This fact, taken together with the internal reforming movements, should prove a sufficient guarantee that the interests of the tribal peoples will not be injured by reason of unregulated and indiscriminate contact. There is, however, one lesson which the emergence of the isolationist position should serve to impress upon leaders of Hindu society. It is that it is both

inexpedient and unjust to attempt to impose their own scheme of concepts and values on all classes. In this regard, the reformers are notoriously the worst sinners. Already their activities in putting their own ideas regarding the drink habit or the marriage tie into legislation seem to be causing unnecessary hardship. The traditional Hindu way, which has ever been tolerant of the settled way of life of those newly entering society, should serve as an object lesson. Provided this lesson is properly learnt no apprehensions need arise on the score of the future of the "so-called" aborigines.

Such are some of the reflections evoked by a perusal of Dr. Ghurye's study in a student of a kindred social science. The reader should be warned, however, that they do not pretend to give a necessarily accurate interpretation of what Dr. Ghurye has to say on the subject; for that, he must go on to the characteristically careful, cautious, and thorough account presented in the pages that follow.

D. R. Gadgil.

Preface

Most of the contemporary nations are composite wholes formed of many ethnic stocks which had their own separate cultures before the nation-making epoch. The differences between the various cultures were in many cases rather small. Today most of them appear homogeneous, at least as regards their major cultural traits. India too has been the home of many ethnic stocks and cultures from prehistoric times. At the dawn of her history the cultural differences in her population appear rather great. Nevertheless, the process of assimilation of smaller groups of different cultures into larger ones of more or less homogeneous culture has been steadily going on. Considering the original differences, the results achieved up to the middle or the third quarter of the 18th century were very hopeful. Owing to a variety of reasons, not the least among them being the nature of the method employed, there were still large sections of the Hindu populace which, in comparison with the uppermost sections, appeared to belong to a different culture altogether, when the British appeared on the scene as the rulers of the land. The old process of assimilation was upset. New problems arose. The sections, till then not properly assimilated, appeared as if they were different from the rest. It is the problem of these peoples which is set forth in this essay.

Being linked up with the political future of the nation, the problem has assumed a very controversial aspect. As a result I have had to load the essay with a far larger number of quotations than I should have liked. Their justification lies in their utility.

I am thankful to Prof. D. R. Gadgil, Director of the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poona, for the readiness with which he undertook the publication of this brochure.

G. S. Ghurye.

19th August 1943.
Department of Sociology,
University of Bombay.

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CHAPTER I*

Animists, Aborigines or Backward Hindus ?

THE Indian census has always included the item of religion as a subject of investigation and tabulation. Under this category, besides the well-understood religious divisions of the Indian population like those of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, there has been shown an obscure and conglomerate division called Animism. The people whose religion is classified as Animism have been described as Animists in contradistinction to Hindus. Though the religious division called Animism was tabulated, the census authorities were more or less conscious of the unreliable nature of the classification.

J. A. Baines, the Commissioner of the Census of 1891, considered the distinction between tribal people who were Hinduized and those that followed their tribal form of religion as futile, because "every stratum of Indian society is more or less saturated with Animistic conceptions but little raised above those which predominate in the early stages of religious development."¹ Mr. Enthoven, the Superintendent of the Census of 1901 for Bombay, observed: "The difficulty that the average enumerator has in identifying this stage of belief (Animism) lies, it is to be presumed, not only in his ignorance of the true significance of much that characterizes it, but, to a certain extent, also in the fact that he is commonly acquainted with very similar acts of worship among members of his own religion."² Sir Herbert Risley remarked that "the not entirely appropriate name of Animism" comprised a "medley of heterogeneous and uncomfortable superstitions;" and pointed out the awkward situation that "one and the same

* Substance of this and the next chapter was delivered as the Annual Presidential Address to the Anthropological Society of Bombay on the 10th March, 1943.

¹ "Census of India," 1891, Report, p. 158.

² Quoted in "The Census of India," 1901, India (Vol. I, pt. I), p. 378.

religion figures in the original returns of the census under as many different designations as there are tribes professing it." Further, he described Hinduism as "*Animism more or less transformed by philosophy*" or "*as magic tempered by metaphysics*." He finally opined that "no sharp line of demarcation can be drawn between Hinduism and Animism. The one shades away insensibly into the other."³ Sir E. A. Gait, the Commissioner of the Census of 1911, remarked that because a man sought the help of a Brahmin priest or made offerings at a Hindu shrine it did not follow that he had given up the last shreds of his "inherited Animistic beliefs," and that owing to the very gradual nature of the process of Hinduizing, it was extremely difficult "to say at what stage a man should be regarded as having become Hindu."⁴ Sir Athelstane Baines, the Census Commissioner for 1891, wrote in 1912 thus:⁵ "One of the most interesting ethnographical questions entering into the census inquiry is that of the rate at which Brahmanism is in name, at least, absorbing the Animistic tribal population. Unfortunately, this cannot be fully solved from the returns, owing to the different interpretations given to the instructions for recording tribal creeds and languages." He used the term "Tribal Animism" or "Tribal Religion" for "religion returned under the tribal name by those who adhere to none of the wider creeds." He referred to "the assimilation of their forms of belief into the religious system of those who have dispossessed them of their territory and position."⁶

Mr. P. C. Tallents, the Superintendent of the Census of 1921 for Bihar and Orissa, acknowledging the "difficulty of distinguishing a Hindu from an Animist" to be very great and "the hopes of demarcating a satisfactory boundary" to be very much less, observes: "The difficulty of distinguishing the religion of such persons from the lower types of Hinduism has always been experienced at every census."⁷ Sedgwick, the Superintendent of the Census of 1921 for Bombay, is still more emphatic and categorical. He says: "I have, therefore, no

3 "The People of India," 2nd ed., pp. 218, 233, 245.

4 "Census of India," 1911, India (Vol. I, pt. I), pp. 129-30.

5 "Ethnography," pp. 8, 9.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 171.

7 "Census of India, 1921, Bihar and Orissa Report," p. 125.

hesitation in saying that Animism as a religion should be entirely abandoned, and that all those hitherto classed as Animists should be grouped with Hindus at the next census."⁸

Mr. J. T. Marten, the Commissioner of Census, was obviously impressed by the facts and arguments like the above, for he changed the religious division of Animism of the previous censuses into that of "Tribal Religions." He mentions how in the earlier censuses the returns of tribal names under the item of Religion were tabulated "under the heading 'Animism' in the census tables." This procedure, he opines, "is distinctly misleading both in its content and its extent." He observes: "There is little to distinguish the religious attitude of an aboriginal Gond or Bhil from that of a member of one of the lower Hindu castes. Both are essentially animistic, and the difference lies in the fact that the one has identified his chief object of worship with those in the Hindu pantheon and has, to a greater or less extent, brought his social and personal life into line with the requirements of the recognized Hindu system. It is obvious, therefore, that the term Animism does not represent the communal distinction which is the essence of the census aspect of religion."⁹ He clearly saw that by changing the heading from Animism to Tribal Religion he was not solving the problem quite satisfactorily; for he remarked: "If the word Animism is vague in respect of what it connotes, the term Tribal Religion is not by any means definite in what it denotes."¹⁰

Dr. J. H. Hutton, the Commissioner of the Census of 1931, retains the heading "Tribal Religions" in the body of the report, uses the term "Tribal" in contradistinction to Hindu, Muslim, Christian, etc. in the tables at the end of the chapter on Religion, and speaks of tribal religion and even primitive religion in his discussion about the relation between Hinduism and tribal religions. Finding the clue to the understanding of tribal religions in the theory of soul-substance he concludes: "It would be impossible to go into all the aspects of the tribal religion in India, but enough has perhaps been said to show

⁸ "Bombay Report," p. 67.

⁹ "Census of India, 1921, India Report" (Vol. I, pt. I), pp. 110, 111.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 111.

that the beliefs held are not mere vague imaginations of superstitious and untaught minds, 'amorphous' as they were described in the census report of 1911, but the *debris* of a real religious system, a definite philosophy, to the one-time widespread prevalence of which the manifold survivals in Hinduism testify, linking together geographically the Austro-Asiatic and Australoid cultures of the forest-clad hills where the isolated remains of the original religion still hold out in an unassimilated form." He considers modern Hinduism to be the result of an amalgam between pre-Aryan Indian beliefs of Mediterranean inspiration and the religion of the Rgveda. "The tribal religions represent, as it were, surplus material not yet built into the temple of Hinduism. How similar this surplus is to the material already used will appear in many ways." Yet the claim of certain politicians to include tribal religions under Hinduism is not logical so long as they "have not reached the stage of accepting Brahmans as priests or of attaching any sanctity to the cow or of worshipping in Hindu temples in their own villages." Nevertheless, he admits that "the line is hard to draw between Hinduism and tribal religions. The inclusion of the latter within the Hindu fold is easy, and wherever hill or forest tribes live in permanent daily contact with Hindus, their religion rapidly assimilates itself to that of their neighbours though the old method of thinking is unchanged."¹¹

Mr. W. G. Lacey, the Superintendent of Census for Bihar and Orissa, thus describes the situation in his Province, which contains the largest number of the people who have been called Animist, among all the Provinces of India: "An aboriginal will adopt certain Hindu customs, he will join in certain Hindu processions, he may even make offerings to certain Hindu deities, and at the same time he may adhere in the main to his old tribal beliefs and practices. It is often quite impossible to say when he has crossed the line to Hinduism. Again, he will often call himself a Hindu for no better reason than that he believes he will thereby improve his social status." After listing twenty-four tribes as undoubted aboriginals, he enumerates seventeen others, whom he would

¹¹ "Census of India, 1931, India Report" (Vol. I, pt. I), pp. 391, 392, 396, 397, 398, 417.

like to regard as semi-primitive and to class with the former. About them he observes: "In most cases these communities have, as the result of a more complete absorption in Hinduism, lost their aboriginal characteristics to a greater extent, and comparatively few of them have remained faithful to the gods of their fathers."¹² Mr. Dracup and Dr. Sorley, controverting the position stated by Sedgwick in the census of 1921, state their view of the situation in the following terms: "Though it is difficult to define Animism and to specify the percentage of the Aboriginal Tribes that does not conform to the major tenets of the Hindu faith, in fact, the vast bulk of these Tribes neither acknowledge the accepted Hindu gods, nor worship in Hindu temples, nor do their devotional practices correspond with those of the Hindu population in the immediate vicinity."¹³ Mr. W. H. Shoobert, the Superintendent of the Census of 1931 for the Central Provinces and Berar, which Province stands second to Bihar and Orissa as regards the number of these Animists, refers to the difficulty of getting accurate returns of those who retain their tribal creeds. The difficulty is further accentuated by the practice of those who are closely associated with the people of the plains, to return themselves as Hindus "deliberately." As for the reasons of this practice he observes that they consider "such a return would elevate them in the social scale, while to the more simple of them the term Hindu does not convey any connection with religion, but merely indicates a race." In his opinion "it would be incorrect to class the Hinduized aboriginal with the ordinary Hindu villager of the C. P., for, although after centuries of varying degrees of contact, each may have assimilated ideas and customs from the other, their cultures are most obviously distinct." Yet, regarding the relation between the descendants of Aryan invaders and the true autochthones, he maintains that "there was much in the religion of each which could easily be assimilated to that of the other." As for the religion of these tribesmen he is aware that it "varies to an extraordinary extent, sometimes from village

¹² "Census of India, 1931, Bihar and Orissa Report," pp. 248, 288.

¹³ "Census of India, 1931, Bombay Report," p. 356.

to village, sometimes from tribe to tribe, and sometimes from tract to tract."¹⁴

It is seen from the above statement that the census officers, in trying to distinguish the creed or creeds of certain tribes from the well-known religions of other Indians, sought to do so by using the term Animism. Yet from the very beginning they were aware of the difficulties, not only practical ones connected with obtaining an accurate return, but also more fundamental ones like the content and extent of the category. One of the census superintendents of 1921, Sedgwick of Bombay, positively recommended that the heading should be dropped at the census of 1931. As is clear from Mr. Marten's remark, quoted above, he, as the Commissioner of the Census of 1921, realizing the force of the arguments, made a lame attempt to solve the difficulty by changing the heading from "Animism" to "Tribal Religions," perhaps taking his clue from Sir Athelstane Baines' work. That this attempt still left some of the difficulties unsolved even in the mind of the commissioner is manifest from his observation that the term Tribal was not definite in its denotation. Nobody controverted the fact of some similarity between the creeds, now called Tribal Religions, and Hinduism as represented in the beliefs and practices of some sections of the Hindu society. The contention of the Census Commissioner of 1911, Sir E. A. Gait, that Animism as understood in the census returns was amorphous was incidentally borne out by the use of the plural in the term "Tribal Religions." Dr. Hutton, the Census Commissioner for 1931, sought to remove this defect by establishing, with the help of the idea of soul-substance as the central concept, a system underlying Tribal Religions. If Dr. Hutton has succeeded in proving his thesis, it provides sound reason for grouping together all the creeds of these people under the single heading of "Tribal Religions" because of the underlying unity running through them all. Yet it does not justify their being separately treated from Hinduism, in view of the chorus of opinion pointing to the close similarity between them and the Hinduism of some sections of the admittedly Hindu society.

14 "Census of India, 1931, C. P. and Berar Report," pp. 397, 333.

Nay, Dr. Hutton's explanation of the genesis of Hinduism strengthens the case of those who have objected to the separate classification of Animists on the ground that their faith is not utterly distinct from some forms of Hinduism. The pre-Aryan substratum, which, amalgamated with Rgvedic religion, gives us modern Hinduism in Dr. Hutton's opinion, must also be a part and parcel of the creeds of the so-called Animists. Just as in modern Hinduism the special features are Rgvedic, so in the creeds of the tribes the peculiar elements are those that have not been incorporated in Hinduism. But the common substratum must subsist in both modern Hinduism and Tribal Religions. When, therefore, Dr. Hutton tells us that "the tribal religions represent, as it were, the material not yet built into the temple of Hinduism," and that the unused material is similar to the material already taken in Hinduism, he is obliterating one side of the picture he himself has painted. In the light of the opinions and observations quoted above, the only sound conclusion is that the creeds of the so-called Animists and the Hinduism of some sections of Hindu society have so much material which is either similar or common or both, that demarcation between the two, being almost impossible, is thoroughly artificial.

There has been another item in the census dealing with Caste, Tribe, or Race of the Indian people. In the Census Report of 1891, Baines arranged the castes according to their traditional occupations. Under the category of Agricultural and Pastoral castes, he formed a sub-heading and named it "Forest Tribes." In the next two censuses, those of 1901 and 1911, Sir Herbert Risley and Sir E. A. Gait included the so-called Animists in the table for castes along with others, indicating against each the number following Hinduism or Animism or another religion. At the census of 1921 Mr. Marten followed the same practice, only changing the heading of "Animism" to "Tribal Religion." Dr. Hutton at the 1931 census followed Baines, but substituted the term "Primitive Tribes" for "Forest Tribes" and added a special appendix on "Primitive Tribes," giving their names and numbers.

Baines in 1891 estimated the number of the members of

the forest tribes to be nearly one crore and sixty lakhs (16 millions), of whom nearly 93 lakhs were returned under their tribal form of religion. In "Ethnography" he referred to these people as "Hill Tribes" and "Forest Tribes."¹⁶ Mr. Marten in his report on the census of 1921 dealt with them under the category of "Hill and Forest Tribes." He observes: "It is not possible to give accurate numbers of the tribal aborigines, but the total number of those tribes who are still, or who have till recently, been considered inhabitants of the hills and jungles, including such tribes as the Gonds, Santals, and Oraons, may be roughly put at something over 16 millions of persons." Of these, 9¾ millions were listed as followers of tribal religions.¹⁷ Dr. Hutton, finding Mr. Marten's estimate defective, made a fresh one. He put the number of the members of "Primitive Tribes"—of India and Burma—at a little over two crores and forty-six lakhs, out of whom nearly 83 lakhs adhered to their tribal religions.¹⁸ Deducting those of Burma we have two crores and 24 lakhs of these people in India. In his presidential address to the Section of Anthropology of the Indian Science Congress of 1939, Dr. D. N. Majumdar declared that there were more than 30 million primitive peoples in India.

We have proposed to confine detailed remarks to the tribes which occupy the Western and Central Belts, as Baines called their region. Roughly speaking, it extends from the Aravali hills in the West, through the Vindhya, the Satpuras, the Mahadev hills, the Maikal range, and through Chota Nagpur to the Rajmahal hills, including the plains and plateaus contiguous to many of them. In terms of political British India, the Provinces of Bombay, the C. P. and Berar, Orissa, Madras, Bihar, and Bengal contain them. They number about a crore and 50 lakhs, i.e., more than half of the total of these people in India. In the order of their numerical importance the principal tribes are: Gond, Santal, Bhil, Oraon, Kond, Munda, Bhuiya, Ho, Savara, Kol, Korku, Paharia, and Baiga.

¹⁶ Loc. cit., pp. 151, 171.

¹⁷ "Census of India, 1921, India Report," p. 226.

¹⁸ "Census of India, 1931, India Report," pp. 502, 503.

The computation of their number is made on the basis of a belief and a principle which must be explained. It is clear that even if a tribe has a Hinduized section, and a non-Hinduized one, the whole tribe is included in the category of "Forest" or "Primitive" tribe, however large the Hinduized section may be. It is seen from Mr. Marten's observations quoted above, that a whole tribe, even when a large section of it lives in the plains amidst other sections of Indian population, is included under the category of "Forest" or "Primitive" tribe. It is not religious affiliation which determines whether a tribe is to be included in this category or to be excluded from it. Nor again is language the test. Neither the Baigas nor the Bhils, for example, speak tribal tongues, and yet they are grouped under the category of "Forest" or "Primitive" tribes. Sir Herbert Risley called them aborigines, but only as a matter of convenience, and pointed out that the term begged an insoluble question.¹⁹ Sir Athelstane Baines was more positive about their being the pre-Aryan inhabitants of India, and included them under the category of "Hill Tribes" in view of their retention of tribal structure. They are according to him "the remnants of primitive communities which have, so far, more or less escaped absorption, and have preserved in a modified, but still distinguishable, shape their independent tribal existence."²⁰ Mr. Lacey is definite that they are the aborigines, and in contrasting them with others calls the latter the "Aryan races." As we have seen, he considers twenty-four tribes of Bihar and Orissa as undoubted aborigines and classifies seventeen others as semi-primitive, as they have lost "their aboriginal characteristics" and have not "remained faithful to the gods of their fathers." His test for classifying a group as an undoubted or "the purest" aboriginal community is the maintenance of separate identity and something of "the old tribal organization."²¹ Mr. Shoober, calling them aborigines, considers them to be of "the true autochthonous stock" and "the original inhabitants of the province." He observes: "The bare fact is that the descendants of the original

¹⁹ "Census of India, 1901, India Report," p. 520; "The People of India" (2nd Ed.), p. 74.

²⁰ "Ethnography," pp. 112, 113.

²¹ "Census of India, 1931, Bihar and Orissa Report," pp. 272, 288-89.

inhabitants of the Province, who before repeated invasions withdrew to the hills and forests where they have lived their own lives and for centuries developed upon their own lines, form more than 20 per cent of the population."²² It is clear that Mr. Shoobert has classified these on the basis of their being the earliest inhabitants or the autochthones of the Province, having been pushed into the hills and the forests by the newer inhabitants, as well as on the ground of their having retained their original traits and pursued their social existence in comparative isolation. But what about those sections of these so-called autochthones, which have refused to be driven into the fastnesses of hills and forests and into the consequent isolation, but have continued to live among the newcomers and have become sufficiently modified to be declared Hinduized? These sections, too, must be grouped with the primitive or aboriginal tribes according to Mr. Shoobert, because their culture and the culture of the ordinary Hindu villager of the C. P. are "most obviously distinct."²³ Mr. Grigson regards them all as aboriginal, and distinguishes the hill section as either the hill tribes or as the wilder aboriginals.²⁴ Mr. Elwin calls the Baigas "the original owners of the country" they occupy.²⁵ He and Mr. Thakkar speak of these primitive tribes as aboriginals.²⁶

Of the older writers Forsyth calls the tract, above demarcated, "cauldron of peoples." After mentioning the principal tribes, Baiga, Bhil, Gond, Kol, Korku, and Santal, he assigns them to two distinct families, viz., Kolarian and Dravidian. He observes: "Which of these entirely distinct families are the autochthones of the land, or which of them first settled here, may possibly never be known. None of them have any reliable tradition of their arrival. . . . Such has been the admixture of their customs, religion, and language with those of the Hindus, that it is impossible now that much of their original distinctive peculiarity remains to be discovered. Yet there is much that is curious and interesting in their pres-

²² "Census of India, 1931, C. P. and Berar Report," pp. 312, 346, 397.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 217, 402.

²⁵ "The Baiga," p. 519.

²⁶ "Loss of Nerve," p. 1; "The Problem of Aborigines in India," R. B. R. R. Kale Memorial Lecture, 1941, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, p. 1.

ent condition, gradually being absorbed as they are in the vast mixture of races composing modern Hinduism."²⁷ As regards Chota Nagpur, Bradley-Birt thinks that the Kols are "the oldest and most characteristic race of the land." The Larka or Fighting Kols went further south, and driving out the Bhuiyas, who had been before them, occupied Singbhum."²⁸ He thinks that great race movements of the Paharias, the Santals, and the Bhuiyas were taking place in the uplands of the Santal Parganas during the last days of Musalman rule. The Jains, who have left enduring monuments to their occupation of Manbhum and Singbhum, have completely "vanished from off the whole countryside."²⁹

The language of the Korkus has affinities with Kherwari, and they are believed to be related to the Korwas and the Mundas. Thus the Korkus, who inhabit the Mahadev hills, are separated from their brethren of the Chota Nagpur plateau by a huge wedge of the Gonds and the Baiga. What language the Baigas spoke is not known. But the language of the Gonds has Dravidian affinities.³⁰ A section of the Paharias of the Rajmahal hills and the Oraons of Chota Nagpur speak tongues "which support their assertion that they reached their present localities from a tract as far distant as the Karnatic." In doing so they have outflanked the Gonds, "a still more powerful tribe which itself is said to have come from the same home."³¹ Russell and Hiralal think that the Gonds and the Konds migrated northwards from a southern home into the Central Provinces and Orissa. And they point out that this hypothesis is supported by the traditions of the Gonds.³² The same authorities look upon the Baigas as a branch of the Bhuiyas of Chota Nagpur, "who have taken or been given the name of Baiga, the designation of a village priest, on migration into the Central Provinces." About the Gonds they are of the opinion that they immigrated into the Central Provinces after the establishment of the Hindu kingdoms about the sixth cen-

27 "The Highlands of Central India," pp. 23, 24.

28 "Chota Nagpore," p. 23.

29 "The Story of an Indian Upland," pp. 41, 131; "Chota Nagpore," p. 84.

30 Russell and Hiralal: "Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces," III, p. 551.

31 Baines: "Ethnography," pp. 115, 118.

32 Op. cit., Vol. III, p. 44; Baines, loc. cit., p. 120.

ture A.D.³³ Mr. Wills thinks that the Bhumias, the Binjhwaras, the Mahatos, the Korwas, and others of the Bilaspur zamindaris, who eke out a precarious existence by the practice of shifting cultivation in the hills, were driven there by the Gonds and the Kamars who immigrated from the east and the north, bringing with them plough-cultivation. He testifies to the evidence of the former dominance of Hinduism in the region in the shape of ruined towns and temples, "dating as far back as the 10th and 12th centuries." Explaining the weakness of Hindu doctrines in the present-day local religion he observes: "But undoubtedly this tract of country lapsed, as it were, into barbarism during the dark ages of the 16th and 17th centuries when the Chathigarhi Rajas lost their power and independence. The weakening of the Rajput power in Ratanpur led to the establishment in the hills of robber chieftains of non-Aryan blood, in whose train followed probably the so-called aborigines who are now found in general possession."³⁴ Mr. Shoovert, who considers the Baigas to be among the original inhabitants of the Province, is not sure about the Marias, the Korwas, the Kamars, and the Bharias. About them he remarks: "How far the ancestors of these people were the earliest inhabitants of the province can only be a matter of conjecture until further investigation has been made."³⁵ The Korkus are believed to have settled in the Melghat hills after the Nihals, who lost so much ground before them that they have become the village drudges of the former and are giving up their language in favour of Korku or Marathi.³⁶

It is seen from the observations and opinions collated so far regarding the internal movements of peoples that many of the so-called aboriginal tribes have come to their present habitat from somewhere else in India. They cannot, therefore, be considered to be the autochthones of their present tracts. When the history of internal movements of peoples is not known and in the opinion of some is not likely to be known, it is utterly unscientific to regard some tribe or the other as the original owner of the soil. It is possible to contend that even

³³ Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 78; Vol. III, p. 45.

³⁴ "Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Zamindari Estates of the Bilaspur District," pp. 5, 14.

³⁵ "Census of India, 1931, C. P. and Berar Report," pp. 345, 346.

³⁶ "C. P. District Gazetteers, Amraoti," Vol. A., p. 133.

if the tribes are not aborigines of the exact area they now occupy, they are the autochthones of India, and that to that extent they may be called the aborigines.

The languages spoken by them belong to three linguistic families. The Mal Paharias speak Bengali and the Baigas speak a dialect of Hindi. Both these Indo-Aryan tongues are the languages spoken by the Hindu population of the respective regions occupied by the two tribes. A section of the Paharias, the Oraons, the Gonds, and the Konds speak tongues of the Dravidian family. The Santal in the far east, the Munda, and the Korku in the west, speak dialects of the Kherwari. Inasmuch as the tribes of these two linguistic stocks are spread out in the way stated above, one of them must be earlier than the other. We do not know which. So, the question as to who are the earliest settlers of India remains still open. Under the circumstances it is hardly right to speak of the tribes as the aborigines.

If the Indo-Aryans are an immigrant people, no less so are the speakers of Dravidian and Kherwari languages in the opinion of Dr. Hutton. He brings both of them from regions outside India, the Kherwari-speakers through the Punjab and the Dravidian-speakers through Sindh. He thinks that the Negritos were the earliest inhabitants of India, but they did not leave any marked trace here. The Proto-Australoids who followed them had their type more or less fixed in India and therefore may be considered to be the true aborigines. Thereafter the Austro-Asiatic peoples came, and they are the Kherwari-speakers, the linguistic affinities of the hypothetical first two not being known. But a section of them passed out of India. The Rgvedic Aryans or the Indo-Aryans came and settled in India; so, too, the Dravidians.³⁷ Under the circumstances no particular race or people can be regarded as the aborigines of India. Others believe that the Kherwari-speakers came from the Northeast. This being the state of our knowledge regarding the peopling of India, it would be hazardous to look upon one particular section of the population as the aborigines of India. The Indo-Aryan type is peculiar to

37 "Census of India, 1931, India Report," p. 460.

India. If the Rgvedic Aryans came later than others, they made up for the lost time by energizing the local people, creating a high culture, and making India their permanent home. Thus science and history do not countenance the practice of calling these tribes aborigines.

Nor is it necessary to call them aborigines in order to get their claim for special treatment recognized. On the other hand, such an argument is likely to meet with the stoutest opposition and create a feeling of hostility toward them, for this argument opens the door to many complications. To adjust the claims of the different strata of the Indian society on the ground of the antiquity or comparative modernity of their settlement in India is a frightfully difficult task, which, if undertaken, will only liberate the forces of disunity.

We have shown so far how a description of the tribes under consideration as aboriginal is neither scientifically correct nor practically necessary. In order to decide how best to designate these people, we must first pass under review their relations with their neighbours, particularly the Hindus of the plains. Bradley-Birt pointed out the strong tendency among "almost all the aboriginal tribes" to embrace Hinduism when they came into contact with it. As a prominent instance of this phenomenon he mentioned the case of the Santals who have adopted Hindu festivals and customs, though they are "one of the most exclusive of all the aboriginal tribes" and "still regard the Brahmin and his faith with all their old animosity."³⁸ Reform movement among the Santals, started in 1871 by one Bhagrit (Bhagirath), called upon them to give up eating pigs and fowls and drinking liquor, and to abandon the worship of their tribal god Marang Buru for that of the one true God.³⁹ Risley thought that the Kurmis of Western Bengal are a Hinduized branch of the Santals who, though very particular with whom they eat, have no objection to eating cooked rice with the Kurmis. The Kurmis employ Brahmins for the worship of their Hindu gods but not for that of the rural or family deities.⁴⁰ One section of the Mahilis, who

³⁸ "The Story of an Indian Upland," p. 20.

³⁹ "Census of India, 1911, Bengal Report," p. 216.

⁴⁰ "The People of India," p. 98.

are considered to have branched off from the Santals on taking up a despised occupation, are so far Hinduized as to employ Brahmins.⁴¹ The Katauris, who are a branch of the wild Paharia of the Rajmahal hills, have long since embraced Hinduism, scorning their connection with the original Paharia stock. "Without the advantages of the Santals and the Paharias they have been forced into close connection with the Hindus, a far more intelligent and highly civilized race. Looked down upon by them with the utmost contempt, placed even below their lowest and most menial castes, they have sought inclusion in the Hindu system as their only hope of emancipation from their degraded position. Though never formally acknowledged, some have won their way to wealth and influence." The Bhuiyas consider themselves to be Hindus, and many important chiefs and zamindars among them claim themselves to be Rajputs.⁴² Mr. P. C. Basu says: "The Bhuiyas are an aboriginal group of people who have been much influenced by the Hindu civilization, so much so that Oriya has nowadays become almost their mother tongue, and every phase of their manners and customs shows an enormous influence of the Brahmanic culture. But still they have preserved many archaic traits of their own, and their present culture is in a stage of transition."⁴³ The Bhumij Kols of Manbham are now Hinduized. They speak Bengali, and their leading men call themselves Rajputs. Bradley-Birt says: "Most of the Hindu festivals they have readily adopted, retaining side by side with them their old tribal meetings for dance and song, for which they have lost little of the original passion of the Kol."⁴⁴

Mr. Tallents, explaining the genesis of the Tana Bhagat movement among the Oraons, remarks: "They also saw their fellow Oraons who had become Hindus or Christians better provided with the world's goods, better educated and better able to protect themselves against their landlords and money-lenders." The hymns which the followers of this movement chanted were in Hindi and not in Oraon. He looks upon the

41 Baines: "Ethnography," p. 118.

42 Bradley-Birt: "The Story of an Indian Upland," p. 12.

43 "Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal," N. S. Vol. XXV (1929), p. 157.

44 "Chota Nagpore," p. 174; Risley, loc. cit., p. 96.

movement as a genuine effort to spiritualize the Oraon religion to suit their needs as a result of their contact with more advanced communities. "Such reforming movements are at once necessary to and a symptom of the vitality of the tribal religion." The other remedy to meet the situation is reflected in the spread of Kabirpanth among the inhabitants of Chota Nagpur. The effect of conversion to Kabirpanth of the members of these tribes is reported to be good. "Their conversion has made a marked change in their outlook and manner of life."⁴⁵ Mr. Lacey quotes the following observation of the Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Paraganas about the Santals: "Where Santals are in the minority and likely to be merged in the surrounding Hinduism, they naturally seek to improve their status by claiming to be not merely members of the Hindu community, but members of a caste which is higher than the lowest Hindu castes. On the other hand, where they are in the majority, they take an intense pride in their own customs and traditions and abhor Hinduism whether high or low. Kurmi Mahtos of Chota Nagpur, who are a fairly educated and prosperous community, are now completely Hinduized. They have now begun to join hands with their namesake in claiming a Kshatriya origin. They have succeeded in retaining their self-respect in a degree which is uncommon among primitive tribes converted to Hinduism."⁴⁶

The Kond, like many hill and forest peoples, is brave and faithful and, unlike some, quite hard-working. But the Uriya Hindu only remembers his stupidity and considers him as only a little superior to the impure Doms. There is the hill section and the plains section, the latter adopting the language and religion of the Uriyas and the Telugus respectively.⁴⁷ O'Malley noted in 1911 that though the Konds of Kondmals were tribal and aboriginal in all respects, those of Puri were so far Hinduized as to resemble the lower Uriya castes in every way. "Not only do they look on themselves as good Hindus; but they are regarded as such by their orthodox Hindu neighbours, who will put up in their villages or stay in their houses."

⁴⁵ "Census of India, 1921, Bihar and Orissa Report," pp. 129, 130, 131.

⁴⁶ "Census of India, 1931, Bihar and Orissa Report," pp. 256, 293.

⁴⁷ "Tribes and Castes of the C. P.," Vol. III, p. 470; Baines: loc. cit., p. 120.

Similarly, though the Savaras of the hills are wild animists, their brethren of Puri are considered good enough to serve as cooks in the temple of Jagannath.⁴⁸ Most of the Kols of the Central Provinces are rapidly coming to resemble an ordinary low caste of the Hindus. They are the best palanquin-bearers, and make excellent masons and navvies. They are "generally more honest workers than the other jungle tribes." Their original language was Mundari. It has "no words for the village trades nor for the implements of cultivation, and so it may be concluded that prior to their contact with the Hindus the Mundas lived on the fruits and roots of the forests and the pursuit of game and fish." The Gonds, the Korkus, and the Baigas have each a Hinduized section known as Raj Gonds, Raj Korkus and Binjhvars. The Andhs, the Bhils, the Kols, the Korkus, the Halbas, and the Rautias are Hindus.⁴⁹

In the Bilaspur district the Holi fire is lighted by a Gond or a Baiga or a member of one of the aboriginal tribes.⁵⁰ For the worship of the village gods like Kharmata and Hanuman, there is usually a village priest, known as Bhumka, Bhumia, Baiga, or Jhankar, who is a member of one of the aboriginal tribes. "Binjhvars commonly hold the office of Jhankar or priest of the village gods in the Sambalpur District, as the Baigas do in Mandla and Balaghat. In Sambalpur the Jhankar or village priest is a universal and recognized village servant of fairly high status."⁵¹ That a Baiga priest was a part and parcel of the village establishment in the Mandla district will be clear from the following quotation from the District Gazetteer of Mandla:⁵² "Though the practice is now falling into disuse, practically every village or group of villages in the district, whether Hindu or aboriginal, at one time had, and most still have a Baiga priest, who receives from each tenant a regular annual remuneration at the usual rate of one Kuro of Kharif seed per plough." The real position of the Baigas was that of being the priests and wizards of the Gonds, and to some extent even of the Hindus.⁵³ The village watchmen in some dis-

48 "Census of India, 1911, Bengal Report," p. 235.

49 "Tribes and Castes of the C. P.," Vol. III, p. 519; Vol. II, pp. 77, 329;

50 E. M. Gordon: "Indian Folk Tales," p. 19.

51 "Tribes and Castes of the C. P.," Vol. I, p. 44; Vol. II, pp. 78, 336.

52 (Ed. 1912) p. 70.

53 Ibid., p. 69.

tracts are members of the aboriginal tribes.⁵⁴ About Bastar, Dr. D. N. Majumdar has shown how the twelve main social groups are moderately differentiated in their cultures so that the transition from one to the next in order is not easy to discern, though the difference between the two groups at the extreme ends appears to be great. He has further illustrated the mutuality and co-operation of the various groups in the State-festival of the Dasara. This feature of the socio-religious life of Bastar he calls acculturation, "which has linked section with section and produced an interesting culture complex."⁵⁵ Mr. Shooberth has pointed out that many customs, specially those connected with marriage and death, vary rather from tract to tract than from tribe to tribe, thus indicating local assimilation irrespective of social grouping. He has also noticed the interesting feature that there are certain universal gods who are to be propitiated by the village Baiga, Bhumia, or Goonia, and who are distinct from special gods of the tribes, clans, or households.⁵⁶ It is clear from this that in a mixed tract there have emerged gods of common faith in whose worship a common priest is employed. One may conclude from this that the tendency to religious integration of a territorial community, irrespective of its division into social groupings, has already existed. Looking at the picture from the aspect of occupations, similar interlacing of the groups appears to be the fact. Whereas the Gond and the Korku males are in demand as farm-labourers,⁵⁷ the women of the Ojhyal and Kolam sections of the Gonds work as tattooers, and those of the Dholi and Nagarchi sections act as accoucheurs.⁵⁸ The Gonds, who are in demand as farm-labourers, in most cases get recognized as Hindus very soon. "In fact, recognition as a Hindu indicates a step upwards on the ladder of social precedence, and a Gond will often impress his importance on a stranger by declaring himself to be a Hindu."⁵⁹

The Korkus celebrate Holi in some fashion. At the

⁵⁴ Fuller, J. B.: "Review of the Progress of the Central Provinces" (1892), p. 32. Vol. I, p. 65.

⁵⁵ "Proceedings of the Indian Science Congress, 1939," pp. 183, 217, 218.

⁵⁶ "Census of India, 1931, C. P. and Berar Report," p. 403.

⁵⁷ Fuller: loc. cit., p. 31; Russell and Hiralal: loc. cit., Vol., III, p. 119.

⁵⁸ Hislop: "Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces," pp. 6, 13.

⁵⁹ N. J. Roughton: "The Census of India, 1921, C. P. and Berar Report," p. 59.

Diwali they have the custom of frightening the cattle; and the Akhatij marks the beginning of the agricultural year. That they consider themselves in some manner Hindus, higher in status than the lowest castes, is clear from their ban on eating or drinking from a vessel used by Chamars, Basors, Moghias, Telis, or Musalmans. As for the Gonds, their brass vessels may be so used, though not the earthen ones.⁶⁰ At the census of 1931 a Korku Revenue Inspector of a tahsil in the Amraoti district remarked that all Korkus were Hindus; but the higher British official did not agree and wrote that though the plains Korkus had adopted some Hindu gods and customs, yet the dwellers in the Melghat had retained their tribal beliefs. They believe that they were specially created by Mahadeo at the request of Rawan to inhabit the Mahadeo Hills.⁶¹

Some of the Bhils are so far Hinduized that they have advanced a claim to be classed as Rajputs. The settlement and opening up of the country has facilitated their merging in the Hindu population. The Khandesh Bhils do not eat food cooked by Mahars, Mangs, Chambhars, and Mochis, though the latter eat the leavings of the food of a Bhil. Some of the advanced sections employ Brahmin priests.⁶² Regarding the Hindu temples on the Mandhata hills in the Nimar district, Forsyth tells us that the most ancient of them at which worship is still offered, are held "by aboriginal Bheels as their custodians, and the more recent by a Bhilala family, who admit their remote derivation from the former."⁶³ About the Chodras, Baines observes: "Beyond their worship of the village boundary gods and their avoidance of Brahmans, there is little to distinguish them from a low caste of Brahmanic cultivators, and they are said to be gradually rising in position through their industry and peaceful habits."⁶⁴ About Thakurs it is reported that "some years back all their ceremonies were conducted by the caste elders, but of late they have taken to employing Brahman priests."⁶⁵ For a Katkari, to take food

⁶⁰ "Hoshangabad District Gazetteer" (1908), p. 76; "Tribes and Castes of the C. P.," III, pp. 555, 559, 567.

⁶¹ Shoobert: loc. cit., pp. 397, 312.

⁶² "Census of India, 1911, Bombay Report," pp. 237, 238.

⁶³ Op. cit., p. 172.

⁶⁴ Op. cit., pp. 123, 124.

⁶⁵ "Census of India, 1911, Bombay Report," p. 306; Baines: loc. cit., p. 124.

from a non-Hindu involves social expulsion. There are some among them, who have made a pilgrimage to Pandharpur, a celebrated sacred place of the Hindus. The Katkari is surely, though imperceptibly, tending towards the standards of the Kubni, the cultivator. He takes part in the Hindu festivals of the village. And here and there Brahmins employ the Katkaris as domestic servants.⁶⁶ The Warlis, too, have been adopting Hindu customs and rituals. Their marriage ceremonies, which were formerly conducted by a priestess of theirs, are now being performed under the auspices of a Brahmin. They evince a faint belief in the existence of a supreme being. There is "a vague consciousness in them that they belong to Hindu Society." Most of the domestic servants in the locality are Warlis and their females are employed as maid servants, freely moving about in the houses of caste Hindus.⁶⁷

Years ago, Forsyth observed regarding the Gonds and the Korkus: "In the case of these particular tribes the admixture of Hinduism has proceeded so far that one has to be constantly on his guard against admitting as belonging to them what is in fact of foreign origin. An intimate acquaintance with Hindu beliefs and peculiarities is therefore the first essential quality of him who attempts to ascertain the distinctive features of these races; and from want of this, great mistakes have constantly been made in describing them."⁶⁸

It is seen from the above discussion that almost all the so-called aboriginal tribes of the region have a Hinduized section, small or large, that they have been in fairly intimate contact with the Hindus for a long time, and that they have common interests with the Hindus in matters of religion and gainful occupation. They have shown a tendency to look upon themselves as Hindus or as people closely connected with the Hindus. They seek to improve their social position by asserting themselves to be Hindus and then establishing a claim for a status higher than that of the lowest or even lower castes.

In regard to the religious and cultural affiliation, Mr. Elwin seems to have appraised the situation properly. He suggests

66 A. N. Weling: "The Katkaris," pp. 34, 149, 150.

67 K. J. Save: "The Warlis," an unpublished thesis submitted and approved for the degree of M. A. in 1935, pp. 454, 455.

68 Op. cit., p. 139.

that all the aboriginal tribes, excepting those of Assam,—and here we are not concerned with them,—should be classed in the census returns as Hindus by religion, as their religion belongs to the Hindu family. But he wants “separate returns of their numbers by race.”⁶⁹ We wonder if Mr. Elwin means by “race” the categories of physical types suggested by Sir Herbert Risley, by Ramaprasad Chanda, by the present writer, by Dr. J. H. Hutton, by Dr. Eickstedt or by Dr. B. S. Guha. If he does, we cannot see what useful purpose such returns will serve. In all probability, he does not mean by race the categories of physical types but only the group-names. If so, all group-names within Hindu society are caste-names; and he should have better asked the returns to be grouped by caste.

It is clear from this discussion that the proper description of these peoples must refer itself to their place in or near Hindu society and not to their supposed autochthonism. While sections of these tribes are properly integrated in the Hindu society, very large sections, in fact the bulk of them, are rather loosely assimilated. Only very small sections, living in the recesses of hills and the depths of forests, have not been more than touched by Hinduism. Under the circumstances, the only proper description of these people is that they are the imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society. Though for the sake of convenience they may be designated the tribal classes of Hindu society, suggesting thereby the social fact that they have retained much more of the tribal creeds and organization than many of the castes of Hindu society, yet they are in reality Backward Hindus.

Failure to grasp this real situation of the tribes under discussion has led many of the British writers on the subject to ask the question as to why these tribes seek and prefer even a lowly status within the Hindu society in lieu of their jungle independence. And some of them feel irritated at what they think to be perverse mentality of these peoples. Others are reduced to the straits of suggesting that these peoples do not understand their own interests. Risley hoped that the Ethnographic Survey would “throw some light upon the singular

69 “Loss of Nerve,” p. 35.

course of evolution by which large masses of people surrender a condition of comparative freedom and take in exchange a condition which becomes more burdensome in proportion as its status is higher."⁷⁰ Mr. Lacey, after describing the step the Kurmi Mahatos of Chota Nagpur had taken in supporting their namesake in claiming a Kshatriya origin, comments: "It may be questioned whether this movement is calculated to promote the best interests of the Kurmi Mahato community." Pointing out further the advantages that the group stands to gain as an aboriginal tribe, he remarks: "It may be that the true position in this respect is not appreciated by many of them. On the other hand, they may be prepared to forego such privileges for the greater honour and glory which they believe will accrue to them in their new status; and it is quite true that, in view of their material prosperity, they do not stand in the same need of protection as the other aborigines of the locality."⁷¹ It never occurred to him that one of the protective measures for the so-called aborigines of Chota Nagpur, viz., the restrictions on the alienation of land, instead of being looked upon by a fairly well-to-do group as a boon, may be considered to be a positive hardship. Mr. Shoobert rightly points out that when the aboriginals themselves claim to be included in the Hindu fold their idea is to enhance their social status, but he is doubtful if that object is achieved. His explanation of the curious phenomenon appears to be that "to the more simple among them the term Hindu does not convey any connection with religion, but merely indicates a race."⁷² The so-called aboriginals expect a social uplift by calling themselves Hindus; they do not actually get it; nevertheless they go on claiming to be Hindus because they believe the "Hindu race" to be a superior one! Mr. Elwin, reviewing some of the tribal reform movements whose purpose appears to be to secure more and more of Hindu approval for the customs of the so-called aboriginal people, opines that they cause "deliberate destruction of tribal culture in order to win the respect of caste Hindus," and notes with regret that the purpose is not achieved. He cites the very instances given by Mr. Shoobert

⁷⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁷¹ "Census of India, 1931, Bihar and Orissa Report," p. 294.

⁷² "Census of India, 1931, C. P. and Berar Report," pp. 398, 397.

in support of his statement quoted above. His explanation of this apparently contradictory behaviour of the people seems to be that the movements are political in origin and that "the Indian aboriginal is all too ready to respond to the slightest hint that he should abandon his old culture and interests."⁷³ Dr. Hutton finds in this phenomenon a tragedy. He observes: "The tragedy is that the object of the tribalist in claiming caste, or in allowing his tribal membership to be treated as membership of a caste, is to obtain social uplift, but the more general result is to achieve merely a greater degradation."⁷⁴ He has not tried to explain why the tragedy is enacted. O'Malley thinks that for the tribal people "the admission of the superiority of Hinduism is the beginning of a decline of independence," and states that it is the educated tribalist who turns to Hinduism. "Education predisposes them to Hinduism."⁷⁵

The older writer Forsyth, on the other hand, who noticed a certain modification in the character of the Hinduized tribalist, understood the phenomenon so well that his observations on the subject, even at this distance of time, have all the refreshing air of originality. Discussing the possibility of the infusion of Aryan blood in the veins of Raj Korkus, he says: "The facility for amalgamation between them—the chemical affinity, so to speak, between the races—seems to be so great, that in a very few generations the points denoting the predominance of one or the other become obliterated." About the Gonds and the Hindus he observes: "I believe that, were the Gonds not associated with hills and forests into which the Hindus have not penetrated very far, they would long since have come to be looked on merely as another caste in the vast social fabric of Hinduism." With such comprehension of the relations between the Aryan and the non-Aryan, the Hindu and the Gond, naturally the phenomenon of the tribalists seeking a foothold on the social ladder of Hindu society holds no mystery for him. His observation of his own society offers him a ready analogy for a complete understanding of the social

⁷³ "Loss of Nerve." pp. 40-44; "The Baiga," p. 512.

⁷⁴ O'Malley: "Modern India and the West," p. 417.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 733, 736.

situation. He remarks: "We have only to make a slight change in the machinery to recognize in all this a system of social promotion going on amongst ourselves in civilized England; and it may perhaps be doubted whether, if a slight change of creed were, as here, the password to advancement of social position, a good many Christians might not be found to discover excellent reasons for such a step!"⁷⁶

The so-called Animists and Aborigines are best described as Backward Hindus.

76 Op. cit., pp. 135, 150, 138.

CHAPTER II

So-called Aborigines and Hindus

It is seen that many of those writers, who have commented on the phenomenon of the tribal people seeking a place in Hindu society, assume that tribalists, on adoption of the Hindu social scheme, secure a very low status therein and that, owing to consequent tribal disintegration, there is a change for the worse in their character. Part of the mystery of and their anguish over the phenomenon is due to these supposed consequences. It is necessary, therefore, to examine in what sense, and to what extent, the change, resulting from the tribalists' inclusion in the Hindu fold, is degenerating to them.

Opinions and observations of a number of writers collated so far do not substantiate the assertion that the tribalists' position in Hindu society is so low as to be degrading. Apart from those sections of the Gond, the Korku, the Baiga and others which, because of their prosperous conditions and also of some power in the past, have successfully established themselves as very nearly equal in status to the Rajput or the Kshatriya, the social position of others appears to depend on their economic conditions. The Kurmi Mahatos of Chota Nagpur, as we have seen above, are claiming a Kshatriya origin, supported by their wealth. Status in Hindu society would also appear to depend upon the calibre and temper of the tribe concerned. Thus the Santals, wherever they win admission into Hindu society, do not do so on any terms, but insist on a status higher than that of the lowest Hindu castes.

Not only is the status, assigned to the included tribalists, not uniformly low, but also those, who had been assigned low status, started asserting their worth long since. The Pankas were considered more or less untouchables; but they turned to Kabirpanth to establish their equality just as the Chamars of Chattisgarh, a regular Hindu untouchable caste, resorted to the Satnami movement for the same purpose among others. The Chamars carried it so far, it is said, that there would have

been a regular battle between them and the other Hindus. As it is, the feeling runs so high that the Chamar cultivators sometimes refuse to pay rent to their Hindu landlords.¹ Regarding these two sects Mr. Shoobert observes: "There are two sects of considerable importance in the Central Provinces, the Kabirpanthis and the Satnamis. . . . They represent respectively the revolt of the depressed castes of Gandas or weavers, and Chamars or tanners, against the tyranny of Brahmanism and the caste system." He quotes the opinion of Mr. Stent, Deputy Commissioner of Amraoti, to the effect that the great body of Shudras no longer regard themselves as inferior, and that the rise of the depressed classes is also an analogous phenomenon. The following remark of his is very significant in this connection: "A spirit comparable to that shown in the preceding observations is evident in the tendency of lower castes, and former followers of tribal religions, to arrogate to themselves privileges formerly denied to their class."²

As early as 1870 the Konds of Orissa showed how susceptible they were to new influences. They proposed to establish schools at their own expense and agreed to carry out any well concerted measure for the suppression of drunkenness.³ The Hos of Kolhan at a representative gathering of the tribe in 1924 passed a number of resolutions, evincing their earnestness for social reform. Education among them had gone so far forward as to lead the authorities to change their previous practice of granting free studentships to all Ho children in schools.⁴ There is enough evidence of the capacity of the Santals, the Oraons, and the Mundas to realize the need for modification of their religious beliefs in the changed circumstances of their tribal existence and also their resolve and tenacity. Their pride of race is not humbled. They are not, therefore, likely to accept a low status within Hindu society. The Gond Mahasabha, though, in the opinion of Mr. Grigson, it does not represent the true interests of all the Gonds, is an organization which could mobilize the political vote of the

¹ Russell and Hiralal: "Tribes and Castes of the C. P.," Vol. I, pp. 314-15; Vol. III, p. 14.

² "Census of India, 1931, C. P. and Berar Report," pp. 327, 329, 355.

³ Dalton: "Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal," p. 301.

⁴ D. N. Mahalingam: "The Cry of Social Reform Among the Aborigines," Modern Review, 1925, pp. 287, 290.

Gonds and is aware of the social evils rampant amongst them. Both Mr. Grigson and Mr. Elwin speak of Gond political consciousness.⁵ Under such circumstances, it is hardly likely that the Gonds would accept the status of an untouchable in Hindu society. As a matter of fact Gonds take rank above Mahars and other outcastes.⁶ The Bhils of Taloda taluk in West Khandesh had an association of their own under the presidentship of a local Bhil chieftain even before 1931. It used to meet regularly and settle disputes within the group. It also carried on propaganda against the drink-evil, so ingrained in Bhil society.⁷ Mr. Thakkar describes the social reform movement started among them by one Gula Maharaj, a Bhil, in 1938. "This movement had a wonderful moral effect. Thousands of Bhils gave up the evil habit of drink, they began taking the daily bath, observing clean habits in everyday life."⁸ With such consciousness and appropriate, though rudimentary, organizations among many of the large tribes of the so-called aborigines, have we good reason to suppose that they will be relegated to the degrading position of untouchables, or that they will accept such a status? We have further to remind ourselves of the tempo of social life today. Contemporary Hindu society is no more the Hindu society of the last century. Untouchability is not the sole idea nor the only pattern held up before the Hindus in respect of the lowly strata. The anti-untouchability campaign, though it might have effected only slight modifications in actual practice, has provided a powerful counter offensive, and a strong alternative concept and pattern. Under such social conditions one need not fear that tribalists, if Hinduized, will fall into the quagmire of social degradation of untouchability.

Mr. Elwin divides the so-called aboriginal tribes into three classes: first, such sections of them as the Raj Gonds and others which have successfully fought the battle, and are recognised as members of fairly high status within Hindu society;

5 "Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District," pp. 39, 40: "Loss of Nerve," p. 39.

6 Hislop: "Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces," p. 12; Russell and Hiralal: loc. cit., Vol. IV, p. 355.

7 "Census of India, 1931, Bombay Report," p. 390.

8 "The Problem of Aborigines in India," R. B. R. Kale Memorial Lecture, 1941, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, p. 27.

second, the large mass that has been partially Hinduized and has come into close contact with Hindus; and third, the hill sections, which "have exhibited the greatest power of resistance to the alien cultures that have pressed upon their border." He finds a great difference between the last two classes. "The second class has suffered moral depression and decay as a result of contacts from which the third class has largely been free."⁹ The causes of this depression, as far as contact with Hindus in pre-British days is concerned, are, according to him, mainly two. The loss of their land, lowering their prestige and self-confidence is the first. But he writes principally about the loss of land as it occurred after the introduction of the British system of revenue and law. About the loss of land in the pre-British period he says: "There is no room here to trace the melancholy story of the collapse of the great Gond kingdoms." The second cause is the casual and transitory nature of the contact with Hindu religion. Under such circumstances "the aboriginal becomes ashamed of his own faith, but has no chance to learn another—and the decay of religion is the result."¹⁰

Bradley-Birt has narrated how the Santals were wandering from place to place in the hope of finding suitable land wherefrom they could not, or would not, be ejected. He has also noticed the bad relations existing between the Hindu cultivators and landlords of the plains and the Paharias of the Rajmahal hills.¹¹ S. C. Roy has told us how the family of a Munda chieftain, who had turned Hindu, slowly but surely introduced Hindu families into the villages of Chota Nagpur from the latter part of the 17th century onwards, and how these latter began to acquire more and more land dispossessing the Mundas and the Oraons.¹² In all these areas the respective tribes were no doubt the earlier settlers, particularly so in Chota Nagpur, reclaiming the land from the jungles. Towards the west the history is not so one-sided. We have seen that according to some authorities the Hindu kingdoms in the Central Provinces preceded that of the Gonds. About

⁹ "Loss of Nerve," pp. 1, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 36.

¹¹ "The Story of an Indian Upland," pp. 131.

¹² "Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society," 1931, p. 361.

the Narmada valley Forsyth observes: "The valley was not long ago—not long, that is, in the history of countries—a hunting ground of the Gonds and other wild tribes who are now chiefly confined to the hills which surround it. At most it could have been but scantily patched by their rude tillage before the arrival of the Hindu races, who have cleared its forests, driven the wild elephant that roamed through them to the far east, and covered its black soil with an unbroken stretch of wheat cultivation that strikes any visitor with admiration. In less than three centuries this has been done. . . . Well-built houses, well-stocked cattle yards, and a general air of comfort and happiness, cannot fail to arrest the attention in Hindu villages. It is true that the people of the soil, those of the Gonds who have preferred to stay and serve a Hindu master to a retreat to the hills, are poorly clad and housed, living like outcastes beyond the limits of the Hindu quarter; but they too are at least sufficiently fed; and nothing but their own innate apathy and vice prevents them from receiving a greater share of the surrounding plenty."¹³ Though in the Narmada valley the Hindus have led the way, in other parts of the region the more usual role of the Hindu appears to have been that of an expropriator, being aided in the process by the peculiar habits of the Gonds. Forsyth says: "Everywhere the aboriginal is the pioneer of the more settled races in their advance against the wilderness. His capacity for toil that would break the heart of a Hindu, his endurance of malaria, and his fearlessness of the jungle, eminently qualify him for this function; and his thriftlessness and hatred of being long settled in a locality as certainly ensure the fruits of his labour reverting as a permanency to the settled races of the plains."¹⁴

For some generations before the Maratha conquest of the Central Provinces in the middle of the 18th century, Hindu colonists had been steadily ousting Gond villagers from the more fertile tracts, so that at the time of the coming of the Marathas, Hindus formed the bulk of the population of the plains and held most of the responsible offices of Government.¹⁵

¹³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 45-47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁵ Fuller: "Review of the Progress of the Central Provinces," p. 28.

The Maratha rule of the Mandla district was too short to leave any permanent marks on land tenure. Land was not parcelled out into large estates and granted to the relatives or favourites of the ruling family. The Brahmin proprietors, who held 436 villages out of a total of 1,555 held in proprietary rights, were mainly the descendants of men who had secured power at the Gond court of Garha-Mandla.¹⁶ Forsyth thinks that in Mandla the interior was not colonized by the Hindus and that only the rich soil within a short distance of Mandla itself was cultivated by Hindu colonists from the Narmada valley, "the wide-open valleys of deep soil" in the remoter parts being "utterly untilled." Nevertheless "the Gonds are here a very poor and subdued race, long since weaned from their wild notions of freedom, with its attendant hardships and seclusion, but still unreached by the influence of the general advancement which has in some measure redeemed them in most parts from their state of practical serfdom to the superior races."¹⁷

There can be no room for doubt that a number of the so-called aboriginal tribes had lost their lands to the Hindus. Some of them were fairly good agriculturists of the usual sort, while others, by far the larger number, carried on crude cultivation of the shifting variety. But this loss of land was largely an incident of conquest or a result of the favour of ruling families, frequently of the so-called aboriginal stock, and only secondarily a consequence of expropriatory tactics of the Hindus.

To appraise the precise effects of the loss of land in the early days that we are here concerned with, is very difficult, as almost all the writers who dwell on the subject of the position of the tribes wrote some time after the British system of revenue and law was introduced. However, an attempt is made here to select what appeared to be specially relevant passages from the earlier of the writers.

Augustus Cleveland, who was affectionately remembered even after the lapse of a century and more by Paharias, one of the wildest of the tribes of Bengal among whom he worked

¹⁶ "District Gazetteer of Mandla," Vol. A, pp. 131-134.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 358, 359.

as an administrator, and whose work was so much appreciated by the then Government of Bengal that it raised a monument to his memory, thought that unless the Paharias were brought into contact with the civilized peoples of the plains, they could not march on to a better state of existence. In the words of Bradley-Birt, "Nothing but their descent into the low-lying skirts of the hills, and their adoption of the life and interests of the plains, could raise them from their backward state." Cleveland accordingly sought to accomplish this in the last years of his life, which was unfortunately cut short abruptly. He was fully aware of the hostile relations existing between the Paharias and the Hindus of the plains. As a matter of fact he was sent to the Rajmahal hills, as we shall see later on, after the Paharias had risen in sullen despair and wrath against the Hindus, to pacify and settle them. He was the first man to adopt what in these latter days has come to be called "indirect rule" as the best method to pacify and keep contented these wild people.¹⁸ One must conclude from this that one of the most sympathetic and successful administrators did not foresee any such evil consequences as that of moral depression from the contact of one of the most backward of the aboriginal tribes with hostile Hindus of the plains. On the other hand, he expected it to lead to the betterment of the aboriginals.

Forsyth's estimate of the condition of the Gonds of the Narmada valley who were living among the Hindus as their farm-labourers is quoted above. Here we shall quote his appraisal of the condition of the Gonds and the Korkus inhabiting the interior of the central and western hills of the region, living in their traditional ways. He says: "Their life has been shown to be one of great hardship and toil. Although so far inured to malaria as to be able to exist, and in some measure continue the race, in the heart of jungles which are at some seasons deadly to other constitutions, the effect of the climate and a poor diet is seen in impoverishment of the constitution, constant attacks of fever and bowel diseases, and often chronic enlargement of the spleen. Imported diseases like cholera and

¹⁸ "The Story of an Indian Upland," pp. 109, 110, 80, 112.

small-pox also commit dreadful ravages among them. The life of labour which both sexes undergo, and their low physical vigour result in very small families, of whom moreover a large percentage never attain maturity. There has been no accurate enumeration of the hill tribes at intervals from which to judge whether they are increasing or the reverse. I suspect the latter as regards those in the interior, though the better-fed and less exposed tribes in and near the plains may probably be increasing." We make no apology for offering another quotation from Forsyth, who, as already mentioned and as will be clearer later on, fully understood the situation of the aboriginal tribes of this region as Cleveland did that of the Paharias. Writing of the labour available for the railway works then undertaken in that part of India he observes: "Large gangs of aboriginal Gonds from the nearer hill tracts were labouring on the railway works. The really wild tribes of the interior of the hills were not yet attracted by the labour market in the plains, preferring a dinner of jungle herbs and their squalid freedom to plenty earned by steady toil under the eye of the foreign taskmaster. But the semi-Hindu tribes of the border-land, who are now the most numerous of the race, and whom long contact with the people of the plains has imbued with wants and tendencies strange to their wilder brethren, have reaped a rich harvest from this sudden demand for labour arising at their doors. How far it has been to them an unmixed advantage will be discussed further on. As labourers their innate distaste to steady toil, born of long years of a semi-nomadic existence, renders them inferior to the regular Maratha navvy from the Deccan, who is also their superior in muscular power, and can double the wages of any Gond at this sort of work.¹⁹ In 1909 O'Malley observed: "The Gond, who has shown himself able to exist apart from his tribe, has also survived Hindu competition well."²⁰

It is fair to conclude from the above observations that, though the so-called aborigines might have lost in self-esteem to some extent when brought into intimate contact with superior people, the contention that loss of land involved such

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 150, 151, 73, 74.

²⁰ "District Gazetteer of Sambalpur," p. 66.

economic distress as to lead to moral depression is not borne out. The tribalists in all probability got their knowledge of regular agriculture from the Hindus. The Hinduized ones began to like settled life, and as a result of the creation of complex wants some sections became far more steady and mobile labourers than they ever were in their original surroundings. Some of them no doubt must have lost their moorings and must have been cowed down by the superior labouring capacity and staying power of the Hindus they came into contact with. But then this depression cannot be considered to be a general phenomenon. Contact or any new situation is bound to affect different individuals in various ways. The less sturdy ones might have succumbed under the stress and strain of the new situation. Others again, despite the loss of their lands, went on working as farm-labourers and on the whole were better fed than their congeners who retired to the hills and forests.

The wild Paharias believe in a just God and in transmigration, according to which "those that have done good in this life may hope to be born again in due time in a higher and more comfortable position than in their former incarnation. Those who have misused their opportunities or abused their position in former days will be born again in a lower grade." In the Santal religion there is a supreme deity called Thakur, exercising supreme powers. Sir Herbert Risley thought that that God, bearing the Hindu name, could not have been a part of the original Santal religion. By implication it seems to have been borrowed by them from the Hindus. Acceptance of Hinduism meant at least so much of faith in something alien from Christianity that the Christian missionaries found it easier to spread their faith among those Paharias and Santals who had not yet come under the influence of Hinduism.²¹ Hindu faith and its technique has so far made inroads in the lives of the Mundas and the Oraons as to inspire in them religious movements, which have very obvious and yet intimate connection with the medium and doctrines of Hinduism, though the influence of Christianity may also be

²¹ Bradley-Birt: "The Story of an Indian Upland," pp. 309, 20; "The People of India," pp. 446, 447.

recognised therein. S. C. Roy, after analyzing the nature of the movements and weighing the relative importance of Christianity and Hinduism in their genesis, was confident that ultimately the religion of Chota Nagpur will "develop more and more on Indian lines, and form part of that great Indian religion of Jnan-Bhakti-Karma, true knowledge, true devotion and right action, which is the essence of real Christianity as well as of real Hinduism."²² According to Hislop, the Hinduized Gonds honour such Hindu Gods as Khandoba, Hanuman, Ganapati, etc., and the worship of Bhimsen is to be met with among all aborigines inhabiting the country from Berar to Bastar. Apart from their "great god" the Gonds recognize a deity who is the "Invisible Creator and Preserver of the World, . . . to whom, in imitation of the Hindu agricultural population, they give the name of Bhagwan."²³ Though Forsyth's remarks only corroborate Hislop's observation and thus may be, in one sense, a repetition, yet in view of the scant respect for Hinduism which they reveal—it can be further supported by other passages from the same book—they deserve to be quoted as specially valuable testimony to the Hinduization of the Gonds and its effects on them. He says: "In both cases (Gonds and the mass of the Hindus) their religious belief is wholly unconnected with any idea of morality. A moral deity, demanding morality from his creatures, is a religious conception far beyond the present capacity of the aborigine or the ordinary Hindu. The idea of a Great Spirit, above and beyond all personal gods, and whom they call Bhagwan, is, however, accepted by all Hindus, and has been borrowed from them by the Gonds. He is the great First Cause of all things, but himself endowed with neither form nor moral qualities. He is unrepresented, and receives no adoration." He also tells us that the Gonds resort to hero-worship, their deified heroes being of "purely Hindu derivation."²⁴ The Baigas and the Gonds of the Mandla district celebrate some of the Hindu festivals in common with the Hindu population. They are the Ganesh festival, the Dasahra, the Divali and the Holi. In the celebra-

²² "Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society," 1931, p. 391.

²³ Op. cit., pp. 16, 17.

²⁴ Op. cit., pp. 142, 145, 146.

tion of the Ganesh festival and the Divali there is no indulgence in liquor. Regarding the observance of the Ganesh festival it is observed: "As this is a festival borrowed from Hinduism, there is no consumption of wine, for which reason no doubt it is not observed by adults."²⁵

It ought to be clear from the above observations that the Hinduized aborigines have religion, and practise it in more or less the same fashion as the lower class Hindus, except that the aborigines have not yet given up the use of liquor in connection with the celebration of as many festivals as the latter have done. They have not only grafted on their own faith bits of Hindu mythology, but have even come to have some idea of God as the First Cause, and the Preserver of the World. Under the circumstances, to say that there is decay of religion is to assert that the large mass of the Hindus has no religion. This assertion can be made either on the basis of a very narrow definition of religion or on the assumption that the religion of a large mass of the Hindus is not moral, an opinion, which, as we saw above, Forsyth held. To us both the viewpoints are utterly anachronistic after all these days of a comparative study of religion. Hinduized aborigines must, therefore, be considered to have received from Hinduism a valuable leaven, though perhaps not as much as one would have liked.

Mr. Elwin, while asserting that there is decay of religion among the Hinduized aborigines, is of the opinion that "provided, however, that the tribesman can really assimilate the new religion, it sometimes has an excellent economic and moral effect." In support of his opinion he quotes the remarks of Col. Ward about the Raj Gonds' change for the better, the opinion of Forsyth, that it is desirable that the aboriginal races should advance by imbibing Hindu ideas, manners and religion towards the type represented by the Hindu cultivator, and the observation of Mr. C. U. Wills regarding the change in the standards of decency, self-respect, thrift, and industry effected among the Paikra Kanwars by their Hinduization.

Mr. Elwin distinguishes between "real" and "non-real" assimilation of the tribalists with the Hindus, and asserts that

²⁵ 25 Mandla District Gazetteer," Vol. A, pp. 58-60.

in the case of most of them what has taken place is non-real assimilation. What this non-real assimilation achieves for the aborigines, in the opinion of Mr. Elwin, we partially saw above, and shall fully see later on—in short, it is loss of nerve and total ruination. Real assimilation, which is rare, he maintains "sometimes" leads to "excellent economic and moral effect." As he quotes their remarks and opinions in support of this statement it is evident that he implies that Forsyth and Wills also distinguish between "real" and "non-real" assimilation and ascribe the betterment only to the first variety of assimilation. This implication is unwarranted and the quotations are slightly misapplied. The writers have no such distinction in mind. They have in view the kind of assimilation that was already there among all those tribalists who had been Hinduized. In full consciousness of that situation they must have offered their remarks. A few quotations are quite necessary and sufficient to render this very clear. Forsyth, in describing the change in the condition of the Gonds and the Korkus of the hills and forests during the ten years or so before his tour over the region, begins by thus characterizing their habits and conditions. "Until lately habits of unrestrained drunkenness have aggravated the natural obstacles to their improvement. . . . It is this unfortunate want of steadiness that has led to most of the misfortunes of the race, to the loss of their heritage in the land, and in a great many cases practically even of their personal liberty. Inferior races give way before superior whenever they meet; and whether, as here and in America, the instrument selected be 'fire-water,' or as in New Zealand, it be our own favourite recipe of powder and lead, the result is the same." Then he goes on to describe the relations between the Gond cultivator and farm-labourer on the one hand and the Hindu zamindars or the Gond chiefs on the other. The transactions between them "are really of the nature of a partnership between the labourer and the capitalist. . . . In either case the result usually is that all the profit, beyond the bare wages his labour would fetch in the market, is absorbed by the man that supplies the money and takes the risk. But the cultivator is far better off also than if he had been working for hire, for then he would not have laboured

half so steadily as his interest in the result of the crop induces him to do." He deals with the situation created by the aboriginals' addiction to drink and their coming into the clutches of Kalars, the spirit-dealers, who fully took advantage of the then existent excise-policy, whereby the Kalars had unlimited powers of establishing liquorshops, etc., and used these miserable drunkards to enrich themselves by their labour in the field and in the forest. Regarding the effect of these conditions on the aboriginals' character Forsyth remarks: "In his wild state the Gond or Korku has been recognized to be truthful and honest, occasionally breaking out into passion which might lead to violent crime, but free from a tendency to mean or habitual criminality. Now he became a thief and a scoundrel." It is this state of affairs that is characterized by him as demoralization of the tribes. Sometime before his tour the excise-policy was changed, which, placing great restraint on the Kalars, led to the loss of the lucrative trade and thus ruined them. At about the same time the system of forest conservation was introduced. Forsyth thus describes the results of these changes: "The habits of the aborigines are now greatly changed for the better. Excessive and constant drunkenness is almost unknown, though drinking to a greater extent than is good for them on occasions has not entirely ceased, ... and the accumulation of the little capital needed to start cultivation on a more regular system is now possible to them all. ... Their contact with the Hindu races was long to them nothing but a curse; but there is now a general agreement of opinion that of late they have been fast improving, both in well-being and in character." Then he presents the farm-accounts of two Korkus to substantiate his statement about the economic betterment of the people. At this stage occurs the following passage: "There can be small room for doubt that the permeation of these aboriginal tribes with Hindu ideas, manners and religion is steadily progressing, and it may be hoped that this influence is now working rather for the better than for the worse. The flighty, debauched, half-tamed Gond was a being much deteriorated from his original state of rude simplicity; but the steady and sober, if illiterate and superstitious, Hindu cultivator of the soil is a type towards which

we should by no means regret to see the aboriginal races advancing. It is true that in thus joining the great mass of Hinduism they will exchange their rude forms of religious belief for a submission to the powerful priestly influence which still prohibits the advance of the people of India beyond a certain point, and for a superstition which is morally no better than their own. The missionary may lose his chance, . . . and when the distant day dawns for the dusky peoples of India, when the light of education shall dissipate their hideous superstitions, and lead them to inquire after a pure belief, they will be there, elevated and improved by contact and assimilation with a race superior to themselves. Such seems to be the probable future of those sections of the aborigines who lie on the confines of Hinduism in the plains." Then he speaks of the aborigines dwelling in the interior of hills and forests as being fitted and necessary for their habitat and as being beyond the pale of any civilization and dwells on their special problems and suggests their solutions, which anticipate Mr. Dracup and Dr. Hutton and Messrs. Elwin and Grigson by sixty to seventy years.²⁶

It should be clear from the above summary that Forsyth leaves on one side the hill and forest Gonds and Korkus as people for whom civilization was an impossibility in the near future. The Gonds and the Korkus in the plains were much demoralized by the practices of the Kalars till sometime before his tour in the region. As we have already seen, in his opinion, the religion of the Gond had not much in it to distinguish it from that of the ordinary Hindu cultivator. And the religion of both was amoral and inferior to Christianity. Nevertheless, he would advocate or rather tolerate the mixing of the aborigines—the Gonds and the Korkus—with the Hindus, a process which was already in existence, now that the scope for the tricks of the Kalars was very much reduced, because he thought that thereby the Gonds and the Korkus were likely to be "elevated and improved" into "steady and sober" cultivators.

H. B. Rowney, writing in 1882, fully appreciates the role

26 "The Highlands of Central India," pp. 151-165.

played by the money-lenders and the spirit-sellers who went among the aborigines to ply their trades. About the effects of the contact thus established he says: "Their contact with these is generally held to have deteriorated their character; but this conclusion does not seem to be absolutely correct. If the intercourse has deteriorated their character to any extent in particular respects, it has certainly improved it in others in a greater degree; and their only hope of civilization rests on such communion becoming closer day by day." As opposed to the part played by the Government, the function discharged by the money-lenders, spirit-sellers and artisans he describes as being that of "a mediatory go-between class" which was wanted "to humanize them." As no other class of society could do it one had to depend on them "for exerting their kind offices in this way, to which they have done as much justice as could have been expected from them." He does not subscribe to the opinion so often expressed about the good character of the so-called aborigines as a whole. "Nothing tends so much to confusion as excessive generalisations, and the good faith and manly character evidently belonging to some tribes have been very wrongly understood to be common to many of them." He rightly points out the source of some aspects of their character as lying in the very nature of their living. He observes: "Many of the tribes have been lauded, and justly, for their love of truth and highmindedness; but these are common traits with men who have 'always lived free.'" He then narrates some of the evil customs prevailing among the aborigines and in the light of their character thus revealed he does not think it right "to attribute any degeneracy in their character to their dealings with the mahajuns and money-lenders, or even to their connexion with the spirit-sellers." The religious notions of the aborigines he thinks were borrowed from the "superstitions of their neighbours." Through this agency, Hinduism, according to him, was "fast drawing them down into its own vortex" and it is this aspect that "may in the future give them a civilization such as it is not in the power of the Government to confer." He maintains that aborigines, who were always dirty, were "barely learning the use of water [as a cleaning agent] from

their neighbours," the Hindus. He concludes by pointing out that they had hardly any advantages over the people of the plains and that "if they are ever humanized to any appreciable extent, it must be by imitating them." The only Gonds, according to him, who had learnt to cultivate by ploughing were those who had had Hindu zamindars over them.²⁷

Mr. C. U. Wills, who made a very strong plea for some protective measure in favour of the so-called aborigines in his settlement report on the Bilaspur Zamindaris in 1912, has some very pertinent observations on the role Hinduization of the aborigines has to play in their future living. Describing the social system of the Bilaspur zamindaris he mentions how the zamindars who are at the top of the social ladder have gained social eminence through their wealth amassed under the British regime. They appear to have been Kawars by origin and were described in 1795 as "Cowheir [Kawar] Chiefs of Mountaineers." "Today they call themselves Tanwar Kshatries, wear the sacred thread and conform at least outwardly to all the precepts of Hinduism." Below them come the Paikra Kanwars, followed by Rathiya Kanwars, Gonds, and others. Their partial acceptance of Hinduism is not merely an index of their desire for social advancement, but leads to actual efforts at social and economic betterment. The case of the Paikra Kanwars is particularly instructive. Mr. Wills observes: "The Paikra Kanwars, a very numerous, well disposed and prosperous community in all the seven northern zamindaris, are an instance of what Hinduism can do to teach primitive people social decency and self respect, carrying with it lessons of thrift, industry and self-restraint; and what is true of the Paikras is true to a less extent of all the other component classes in the superior social stratum of these estates. They are now rapidly improving their standard of living and this means greater industry, greater credit and greater agricultural stability." It is not only the better class of the so-called aborigines that profits by its desire for assimilation into the Hindu fold, but even such low class sections as the Panikas show more or less the same effects. They are followers of Kabirpanth and

²⁷ "Wild Tribes of India," pp. 211-219, 9.

though their living is not entirely in keeping with the high level of the religious tenets of their sect, yet it is influenced enough to make them desist from intoxicants in deference to them. The consequence of the effort at better living is very clearly reflected in the agricultural development in the tracts where these Paikra Kanwars and similar people are largely met with. About this phenomenon Mr. Wills observes: "When to these signs of social advancement it is possible to point to remarkable agricultural development, thousands of acres brought under new cultivation year by year and land embanked at such a pace that it is a difficult task to keep the field-survey work up-to-date, it is clear that we are dealing with a people suited to their environment, vigorous, capable of being developed into excellent agriculturists."²⁸

The late Rai Bahadur S. C. Roy, fully aware of the evils which the introduction of Hindu landlords among the Mundas and the Oraons brought in in its train, remarked that it was not "an unmixed evil." He opined that it was "their long contact with the Hindus" that had raised "the Mundas of the eastern paraganas of the Ranchi District in the scale of civilisation." He was struck by "their comparative freedom from the proverbial Mundari vice of drunkenness." The deeper influence, working through folk-tales, songs, customs and beliefs, had also proved beneficial. He sounded a particular caution against overlooking this silent influence "in the presence of the crying evils of zamindary aggression and oppression which afflicted the Mundas during the last two centuries."²⁹

The Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes Committee of Bombay was of the opinion that the problem of aboriginal and hill tribes arose from the fact of their isolation from the main body of the community.³⁰ Mr. D. Symington, who emphatically opposed this view and maintained that the problem was due to "their contacts with the main body of the community," inadvertently admitted that they profit by the example of their Rajput Kunbi and other neighbours, both in

²⁸ "Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Zamindari Estates of the Bilaspur District" (1912), pp. 10, 11.

²⁹ "The Mundas and Their Country" (1912), pp. 351, 352.

³⁰ "Report," pp. 4, 5.

their methods of agriculture and the general management of their affairs." He further recorded their own observation that as regards the necessity of liquor for certain socio-religious occasions their Hindu neighbours did not use it and yet they were all right.³¹ Thus they can profit greatly by association and assimilation with the Hindus.

Some sympathetic administrators and competent observers thus hoped that the improvement in some aspects of the character of the tribalists would come about only through their assimilation in Hindu society. Others have left testimony to such improvement actually taking place through the same channel in respect of a number of tribes from the Paharias of the Rajmahal hills to the Korkus of the Tapti valley. Improvement in the character of the tribalists through their entrance into Hindu society is then an almost uniformly expected phenomenon. Does this mean that there was expected and actually occurred only improvement? Was there nothing in the results of this assimilation which may be called evil? Hardly can this be the case unless the society in which the tribes sought and got entrance was very perfect. If the society were so perfect the aborigines could hardly have got admission and it is doubtful if they would have sought it if the society, because of its perfection, were so different from their own. The key to the situation lies in the fact that the lower class Hindu society—the society of the ordinary cultivators—is so akin to that of the so-called aborigine that he hardly feels the transition in many respects and tries to imitate the Hindu cultivator, slowly but surely, in a number of culture traits, in order to win his approbation and thus secure his own status. In this process one would expect that in a fairly long transitional period some changes in the character and condition of the tribalists would be of an undesirable kind.

We shall now proceed to describe the changes by reviewing the history of a few representative tribes, though the study cannot be confined to the pre-British period in this particular, as the writers generally refer to the total situation as it appeared to them after the effects of the British system of law

³¹ "Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in Bombay," pp. 1, 87, 63.

and revenue had commingled with those of the previous period.

Some of the tribes had kept their independence till the beginning of the British rule in India to such an extent that they defied the Hindus of the plains till the British arms brought them under control and opened their country to partial Hindu influence. Perhaps the Hos of Kolhan, who are aptly known as Larka or fighting Kols, are the only people to have continued such an existence. It is stated that the Hos were so strong that in order to preserve their country for themselves they not only refused to allow any non-Hos to settle amidst them, but prevented even the Hindu pilgrims, on their journey to the shrine of Jagannath, from passing through their country and thus forced them to make a long detour to reach there. The Kolhan became known "far and wide as a forbidden land which no stranger might cross."³²

In 1819 the local chief requested the help of the British to assert his authority over the Hos, who had been giving trouble from time to time. The British sent military help and began operations against them. But it was not till 1831, when the Hos joined the Chota Nagpur rebellion, generally known as the Kol Mutiny, that serious attempts to reduce their last fastnesses were made and the Hos finally subdued, being persuaded to submit to the rule of the British.³³ British rule in Kolhan opened the country to Hindu influence. The first Christian mission began its work in 1864.³⁴ In 1910 O'Malley wrote: "The Hos are strongly attached to their own beliefs, and few become converts to Christianity. . . . On the other hand, there is some tendency towards Hinduism, especially in caste matters; some Hos, for instance, are inclined to show increased respect to Brahmans as compared with other men. It is said that this tendency has not spread far; but if not popular, it is at least noticeable, for at the last census it was reported that 'some Hos style themselves Hindus and profess to believe in the Hindu gods and goddesses; some have taken to wearing the Brahmanical thread.'" About the effects of this contact on the character of the Ho he says: "Exclusiveness is still a

³² Bradley-Birt: "Chota Nagpore," pp. 84, 85; Dalton, op. cit., p. 179.

³³ "Chota Nagpore," pp. 88-93.

³⁴ "District Gazetteer of Singhbhum," p. 53.

distinctive feature of his character, but much of it is wearing off in those parts where foreigners (*Dikkus*) have come in and settled."³⁵ Dr. D. N. Majumdar has described the movement for reform among them. We have quoted above sufficiently to show that the Hos are getting educated. One of the resolutions passed by their gathering referred to the prohibition of women from working in the bazaars. Dr. Majumdar has pointed out how the Ho woman has to work hard while the Ho male lives a comparatively lazy life.³⁶ Under the circumstances, though Mr. Elwin³⁷ does not like this idea of reform, which the Hos advocated, it can be seen that in spite of the new custom preventing the women some outdoor life, it is essentially beneficial to them and to the Ho community. The Hos who were recorded as Hindus at the census of 1931 were a little over one-third of the other Hos. It is seen that when the economic cause of animosity between the Hindu chieftain and the Hos was removed, the little contact that took place proved beneficial to the Hos.

The Paharias were in contact with the plains' Hindus whom they were in the habit of plundering from time to time. The Hindu zamindars of the plains had tried the "gentlemanly" method of bribes in order to keep the marauding activities of the Paharias in check, but had failed to procure the results they wanted. There was then a treacherously planned wholesale murder of the visiting Paharias which was followed by a terrific reprisal by the latter. While engaged in their avenging activities the Paharias came into conflict with the British interests in 1772. The Paharias almost came out successful in their passage of arms with the British forces and carried on their depredations till 1778, when the British officer in charge of the operations decided to try the method of conciliation. They were offered not only rule through their own leaders, but were also promised an annual bribe of a fixed sum. The lands at the foot of the hills were to be portioned out to retired or disabled sepoy so as to raise a ring-fence of militarily trained cultivators.³⁸ In spite of Cleveland's desire to bring them into

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 71.

³⁶ "Modern Review," 1925, pp. 287.

³⁷ "Loss of Nerve," p. 31.

³⁸ Bradley-Birt: "The Story of an Indian Upland," pp. 59-77.

close contact with the Hindus of the plains it seems the contact did not come about and only a very small section is Hinduized. They seem to keep to their old habits. "They cultivate on the wasteful system of jungle burning."³⁹ Bradley-Birt observed: "If a future remains for them, differing in the smallest degree from their past, it is far to seek."⁴⁰

The Santals were settled by the Government in the Daman-i-koh of the Santal Parganas about 1836. The lands of the Daman-i-koh were fertile and were long coveted by the Hindu inhabitants of the plains. But their desire had remained unfulfilled owing to the marauding habits of the Paharias of the hills behind. Under the toil of the Santals the land smiled with rich crops and there was the atmosphere of plenty and prosperity for a few years. However, the Santals, though their tribal system was intact and though they hated the Hindus who reciprocated in their feelings, had many of the faults of the tribalists. The happy-go-lucky and improvident nature of the Santals revelled in the unaccustomed plenty of their new home, which did not sharpen their intellects or make them any better to deal with the clever trader and the money-lender. The Santal had very rudimentary notions about the value of money. The situation naturally lent itself to the joint operations of the tactics of the trader and the money-lender. The result was that the Santal was in the grip of utter ruin, the genesis of which he scarcely understood. Anxiety and despair began to take hold of him and he grew sullen. When the last stage of the whole drawn-out transaction was reached and the Santal was faced with the loss of his land, his sullenness turned into a desire for violent revenge. When the work on the railways offered itself at their doors and many of the Santals, being bound for agricultural service to their landlords, found that they were not free to take advantage of it, the stage was fully set for what is known as the Santal Rebellion of 1855. Rising as one body the Santals carried everything before them, burning and pillaging whatever they came across, killing not only the hated Hindus but also Englishmen and women, who had settled as planters or as factory

³⁹ Baines: "Ethnography," p. 119.

⁴⁰ Op. cit., p. 19.

owners. The natural sequence followed in the shape of military operations to quell the rising of a people whose only weapons were bows, arrows and axes. Bradley-Birt has graphically described the pathetic situations arising amidst this unequal contest, the ignorant Santal not understanding the temper of disciplined troops and the power of powder and bullet. Ten thousand Santals are believed to have perished in the rebellion. The rising quelled, the Santals were pacified by the creation of a new district called the Santal Parganas, which was to be administered more or less through the Santal tribal organization itself.⁴¹ In administrative matters things changed for the Santal Parganas, as will be noticed later on. Here we are concerned only with the changes effected among the people as a result of contact with the Hindus. The new regime brought back prosperity to the Santal. He could profit by the railway employment and was much in demand for the tea-gardens farther away from his home. Unlike the Paharia he has shown willingness to take advantage of all opportunities for selling his labour. The working of huge coal-fields at Girideh, Jherria and Raniganj offered him facilities nearer home. Work on the coal-fields suited him the best as it could be made to fit in with his off-season in the agricultural operations. Christian missionary activity, starting its work in Bankura in 1840, in the Santal Parganas in 1862, and in Manbhum in 1864.⁴² has enabled the Santal to educate himself to such an extent that many Santals have gone forth "into the world as clerks, assessors, and accountants, to compete on equal terms with their more favoured neighbours." The tribal *panchayat* was still powerful in matters of Santal law and custom, which ordinary courts of justice did not take cognisance of. "Even now, superstitious as in earlier days, the Santal lives continually in fear of witchcraft and the evil eye." Yet there has been a great change in the treatment meted out to supposed witches; for though occasionally a woman, convicted of witchcraft, may be beaten to death by the villagers, more or less spontaneously, nevertheless "seldom now does the

41 "The Story of an Indian Upland," pp. 159 ff.

42 "District Gazetteer of Bankura," p. 46; "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," p. 68; "District Gazetteer of Manbhum," p. 75.

Panchayat venture on any more drastic measure than driving the obnoxious individual from the village." They have remained a suspicious people with constant under-current of unrest, ready to take shape in serious upheavals, if their passion for land, which they consider to be theirs for all time, is stirred or their fear of the spirits of the unseen world aroused. With all this data before him in 1905 Bradley-Birt, who thought that as between the Paharias and the Santals the latter were capable of change and who knew full well the Santal's hatred of the Hindus and the latter's equally strong reciprocation, thus wrote about their future: "Everything today points to Hinduism—even the Hinduism that has lost its first faith and is fighting its own battle of doubt and scepticism—as the absorbing force of the future among the aborigines of Bengal. In the direction of increased material prosperity there is little prospect of advance. . . . With no higher standard of existence before them towards which to attain, they are blissfully content with conditions as they are, living with careless lightheartedness from hand to mouth and utterly unmindful of the days to come. . . . The future promises them no change from the manner of life that has passed changeless through the centuries."⁴³

The suspicious nature of the people made them prone to take up hints and show sullen and hostile attitude to anything that appeared new. Thus at the first two or three censuses they were greatly agitated and but for a tactful handling of the situations there would have been serious rioting. Perhaps this characteristic was strengthened by the fact that their exploitation by neighbouring landlords, traders and money-lenders began in one form or another after the district had by slow but sure stages ceased to have its peculiar administrative features as a non-Regulation district, in spite of some special legislation which was passed during the regime of Sir George Campbell in 1871. In the non-Regulation district of Birbhum, adjoining the Santal Parganas on the south-east, at least great chicanery continued to be practised on these ignorant people. McAlpin's report on the condition of the

43 "The Story of an Indian Upland," pp. 219, 222, 223, 21, 22.

Santals, published in 1909, contains a number of such authentic cases of great fraud committed by money-lenders to gain ownership of the Santals' lands. The report itself was the result of an inquiry necessitated by the agitation of the Santals in 1906-07.⁴⁴ In 1910 O'Malley thought that the few Santals of the Santal Parganas that lived in the vicinity of the Hindu agricultural villages had alone learnt to take proper care of their lands and had thus improved the quality of their agriculture. He further observed: "Under the influence of Hindu caste ideas they are gradually developing into a kind of cultivator caste; whose real occupation is agriculture of an inferior kind, and whose leisure time is spent in idleness."⁴⁵ In 1931 they were still described as excelling in the art of reclaiming waste land by clearing the jungle or otherwise, but as poor agriculturists who had still much to learn about agriculture. At the census of 1931 nearly 40 per cent of the Santals were returned as Hindu, while only about 24,000, or not even one-hundredth of the total, were classed as Christians. Mr. Lacey remarked that the Santals of Bihar and Bengal combined had increased by 33 per cent between 1901 and 1931 — "a rate of growth just double that achieved by the population of this province [Bihar and Orissa] as a whole and a striking indication of the hardy, prolific character of the tribe."⁴⁶ Great hardihood and high fecundity of these people have attracted the attention of many writers. Bradley-Birt⁴⁷ remarked about it in 1905. In 1911 H. Coupland was not satisfied that the high rate of increase among them could be wholly "accounted for by their well-known fecundity" and thought that "there must have been also a considerable influx from outside, more specially in the coalfield area."⁴⁸

The contact of the Santals with the Hindus has thus been taking place in an atmosphere that was vitiated from almost the very beginning. The prevailing stereotypes have been anything but favourable for the influence of the Hindus to operate in a normal manner. The usual greed of the money-

44 Dr. Hutton in "Modern India and the West," Ed. L. S. S. O'Malley, p. 427.

45 "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," pp. 101, 104.

46 "Bihar and Orissa Census Report," 1931, pp. 299, 296.

47 "The Story of an Indian Upland," p. 230.

48 "District Gazetteer of Manbhum," p. 77.

lender and the absentee landlord is probably aggravated here by the greater pressure of population on land. On the other hand, there is much in the character of the Santals themselves to whet this appetite. Whatever the reasons, the one fact which stands out in the history of the relations between the Hindus and the Santals is that the atmosphere has always been surcharged with distrust, hatred and contempt. Even under such unfavourable circumstances the Santals have clearly demonstrated their partiality for the Hindu fold and have profited by their contact to the extent of making at least some improvement in their agricultural methods. We have seen that in the purely religious domain their acceptance of Thakur as the supreme god was considered by Sir Herbert Risley to be due to the influence of Hinduism. Bradley-Birt has testified to the softening of their attitude towards the supposed witches. He has also pointed out that they have modified the celebration of their great national festival of Sohrae, the Feast of Harvest. Formerly the celebration of Sohrae used to take place consecutively in the different villages, the complete celebration taking weeks. But now the Santal per force celebrates the Sohrae on the same day throughout the district. This is a great gain to the social welfare of the Santals and indeed a great sacrifice on their part. Sohrae is a festival in which "the wildest excesses of license and debauch are sanctioned, and the worst that the Santal can do is easily atoned for by a libation with the prescribed formula when the Sohrae is at an end."⁴⁹ With the more settled conditions of life that have come about, the Santals have shown desire for change in some of their cultural traits. Women may now be said to be no longer considered as chattels. A strong desire has become apparent to allow property to pass to the female line in preference to more distant male relatives in default of sons.⁵⁰

Tribes, so far dealt with, are typical of the peoples whose relations with the Hindus are positively known to have been unhappy and unpleasant and the mutual attitudes hostile for years before the introduction of the British system of revenue and law. We shall now consider some of those tribes whose

⁴⁹ Op. cit., pp. 250-52.

⁵⁰ "Census of India, 1921, Bihar and Orissa Report," p. 238.

chiefs became Hindu and introduced Hindu landlords by way of bestowing favour, the peoples' attitude to the Hindus as a whole not being hostile in the beginning. But later on, their interests clashing with those of the new settlers, they rose against them soon after the British acquired a sort of dominion over the country occupied by them. Principally they are the Mundas and the Oraons of Chota Nagpur, the former even more than the latter. The late Rai Bahadur S. C. Roy contributed a special paper dealing with the effects of contact with both the Hindus and the western civilization on these people, a few salient facts gleaned from which will suffice here. As stated earlier a Hindu-Munda chief's family first introduced Hindu officers and Brahmins in the latter half of the 17th century. The Hindus had gone to work in the usual way by getting larger and larger grants of the soil they coveted, and by turning the peasant proprietors into tenants. Sometime before 1780, the British had acquired a sort of dominion over part of the region. With the serious task of administration begun in 1780 strangers from Bihar and Bengal were introduced not only as subordinate officers but also as landlords.⁵¹ There were a series of armed risings of the Mundas in the years 1789, 1797, 1807, 1812, and 1819-20 which sought redress for their wrongs. The state of affairs after the introduction of the British system of law and revenue deteriorated so much that in the rising of 1831, generally known as the Kol Mutiny or Rebellion, the whole aboriginal population was involved. After the rebellion was quelled, an enquiry was instituted. The result of it was that the ordinary laws for the sale of land, etc. were withdrawn. Special treatment was offered to the whole province.⁵² Yet the grievances of the tribalists seem not to have disappeared, for there was another serious rising of the discontented Mundas in 1899, which had to be suppressed with military aid. A Record of Rights, whose preparation was mooted for a long time, was finally ordered to be prepared and was actually completed in 1910. It showed that of the total cultivated area of 3,614 square miles, "most of which was originally reclaimed by the aboriginal cultivators," only about 400 square miles were owned by them.

51 Bradley-Birt: "Chota Nagpore," pp. 17-19.

52 Ibid., pp. 19-21; Roy in J. B. O. R. Soc., 1931, pp. 361 ff.

The reactions of the two principal tribes, the Oraons and the Mundas, manifested themselves under the leadership of Birsa in tribal movements of no rent and better religion.⁵³ Christian missions started their activities in this region since 1846.⁵⁴ S. C. Roy's opinion about the good effects of Christianity and Hinduism on the religious side of these movements has been referred to. Tallent's observation that the tribal Oraons were impressed by the advancement of their brethren who had officially embraced Hinduism or Christianity is also quoted. Similarly his opinion that spread of Kabirpanth in Chota Nagpur has made a marked change in the outlook and manner of the hill peoples is also mentioned. It is also stated that the "mantras" and hymns chanted by the Tana Bhagats are in Hindi. Mr. Thakkar mentions the Oraon Rai Saheb Bandi Ram as one interested in the social and educational uplift of the tribe.⁵⁵ Roy thought that in one respect the introduction of British law had good results. Objectionable practices like trial by ordeal and persecution of supposed witches are gradually losing their hold on the people. The bulk of the people have not yet reconciled themselves to the loss of their status as owners of the soil.⁵⁶ At the census of 1931 of the 10 lakhs and odd Oraons nearly 41 per cent were returned as Hindu, while nearly 20 per cent were classed as Christian. It is reasonable to conclude from the above statement that the Mundas and the Oraons do not show any signs of loss of nerve or very marked ill-feelings towards the Hindus, against whom they have a legitimate economic grievance. Shorn of the economic aspect of land-grabbing through chicanery, in which process, as will be made clear later on, the British system of law helped the Hindus, the contact of the aborigines with the Hindus is productive of good to the former, who go so far under that influence as to try to revitalize their crude and worn-out creed.

The Konds, well-known for their sacrifice of human victims, are another tribe which took up arms to redress their agrarian grievances. In Kalahandi state, adjoining the dis-

⁵³ Roy, loc. cit., pp. 372-73; "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. XII (Memorandum of the Bihar and Orissa Government), pp. 341-42.

⁵⁴ "Census of India, 1901, Bengal Report," p. 162.

⁵⁵ Op. cit., p. 33.

⁵⁶ J. B. O. R. S., 1931, pp. 375-76.

trict of Sambalpur, the Feudatory Chief had encouraged the settlement of Koltas, who are known to be very expert cultivators. The Koltas soon brought the Konds under their economic grip, with their eyes on the lands owned by the latter. It seems the Konds realized the situation fairly soon and decided to wrest back from the would-be usurpers all that they had taken. In 1882 they rose up in arms and murdered a large number of Koltas. The rising was put down and the Konds were pacified.⁵⁷ The practice of human sacrifice has been all but totally suppressed. As early as 1871 the Orissa Konds had manifested a desire for education and moral improvement and had agreed to work for suppression of drunkenness. It is surprising to learn that they had even asked for administration of justice through their own elders, a proposal, which, in the opinion of Col. Dalton, should have met with encouragement.⁵⁸ Again in 1908 the Orissa Konds took a vow of total abstinence from liquor but, finding the temptation too great, two years later they requested Government to close all liquor shops. The request was granted. It should be noted that the Orissa Konds are largely Hinduized. In 1911 the census recorded nearly 45 per cent of these Konds as Hindus. In 1931, of the three lakhs and sixteen thousand Konds of Bihar and Orissa 53 per cent were returned under the Hindu category. This volume of Hinduization is very remarkable as among the Madras Konds, including the Jatapus, there is not a single individual returned as Hindu, all being classed as Tribal. As the number of Konds in the Madras Presidency—now most of the tracts form part of the Orissa Province—was greater than that of the Bihar and Orissa Konds, of the total number of Konds—seven lakhs and forty-one thousand—the Hindu Konds formed only about 23. per cent. The Madras Konds have not had the same opportunities of coming into close contact with the Hindus.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ "Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces," Vol. III, p. 480.

⁵⁸ "Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal," p. 201.

⁵⁹ O'Malley, op. cit., p. 736.

CHAPTER III

So-called Aborigines and Hindus (Contd.)

OTHER aboriginal tribes of the region we are considering do not seem to have given vent to their feelings through organized rising or rebellion. Perhaps they have not the same spirit or grit as the tribes dealt with so far. They cannot be believed to have disintegrated more than some of the other tribes. Possibly their grievances were not so serious as those of the other tribes. Perhaps they have greater capacity for adaptation to new circumstances.

We have already quoted Mr. Lacey's observations regarding the Kurmi Mahatos of Chota Nagpur—how they have kept up their self-respect within the Hindu fold, how they are prosperous and enterprising and better educated and how they have joined their namesake in claiming a Kshatriya origin. Though their exact number is not available, Mr. Lacey thinks that out of the 6,60,000 Kurmis enumerated, an overwhelming majority would be Kurmi Mahatos.¹ Of the Kharias—nearly 1,46,000—44 per cent were returned as Christians and nearly 36 per cent as Hindus at the census of 1931. Col. Dalton thought that the Kharias, settled in some of the estates of Chota Nagpur, were far more civilized than those who lived apart.² S. C. Roy and R. C. Roy point out that two of their sections are now settled agriculturists, the Dudh section being more so than the other. This section practises terraced cultivation, and its members are comparatively well off. As a result of their settlement they have been able to make progress in economic organization and co-operation, and have been able to maintain steady progress in economic and social matters. The hill-Kharias contrast unfavourably with them. The above-mentioned writers assert that "the present improvement and increasing upward trend in the cultural evolution of the Dudh

¹ "Census of India, 1931, Bihar and Orissa Report," p. 294.

² Op. cit., p. 153.

Kharia" is the result of their contact with higher culture—Christian and Hindu. The Dudh Kharias seem to have made much progress in education, their youth taking education both in schools and colleges. Thus they have been in contact with the Hindus in two ways. They have trade-relations with Hindu merchants and their youth have close contact with Hindu youth in the educational institutions and their hostels. "In these circumstances, some ideas and cultural traits of their Hindu neighbours which fit into their own culture and are consistent with their own traditions and ideas and their own line of development, are being gradually adopted and assimilated as integral parts of Kharia culture."³ Even the Bhumij Kols, whom Bradley-Birt⁴ described as a turbulent race and the most refractory class in the Manbhum district, seem to have benefited, to some extent, by their Hinduization as the following guarded statement of Coupland suggests. "Hinduization has, perhaps, not greatly improved the original Bhumij; he is, it is true, no longer the wild marauder of the 17th and early 18th centuries, but to this day the tribe provides innumerable recruits to the gangs of petty burglars and dacoits of the south and east part of the district. He is at the best a poor cultivator, displaying the minimum of skill and is notorious as a bad tenant."⁵

At the census of 1931, the Gonds numbered approximately 30,63,000 and were met with in the Madras Presidency, Hyderabad State, the Central Provinces and Berar, Central India, the United Provinces, and Bihar and Orissa. The Hyderabad State contained a little over 1,13,000 of them, all being recorded as Tribal. The few thousand Gonds in the Madras Presidency similarly were classed Tribal. Only 35 Gonds of the whole total were classed as Christians, though Christian missionary activity seems to have started in some parts of the Central Provinces as early as 1840.⁶ In the United Provinces all the Gonds—1,21,000—and in Bihar and Orissa almost all—2,55,000—were entered under the category "Hindu." In Central India, of the 2,80,000 Gonds nearly

³ "The Kharias," Vol. II, pp. 516, 526, 520.

⁴ "Chota Nagpore," p. 174.

⁵ "District Gazetteer of Manbhum," p. 79.

⁶ Forsyth: loc. cit., p. 379.

26 per cent were Tribals and the rest Hindus. In the Central Provinces, the present home of the Gonds, there were nearly 22,61,000 Gonds. Of these only about 46 per cent were recorded as Hindus, the rest being shown as Tribals. Of the total number of Gonds 53 per cent were classed as Hindus.

There are three subdivisions among them, two of them being aristocratic. Of these latter the Raj Gonds of the C. P. are better known. The Raj Gonds rank with the Hindu cultivating castes; and Brahmins take water from them. The Raj Gonds section would appear to be as wide as the landholding section of the Gonds. About their status, their occupation, and their relations with plains' Hindus, we have already quoted the opinions and observations of one of our best early authorities, viz: Forsyth. Here we shall confine ourselves to the effects of contact, since the British system of revenue and law was firmly established among them, as summarized and evaluated by later writers. In 1892 J. B. Fuller thus described their position: "They are now reckoned amongst the lowest classes of the community, banished to the most hilly and infertile tracts, or, where clinging to the open country, holding the most inferior positions in the village economy." Most of the zamindari estates were held by the the Gonds, the Halbas or the Korkus. They were "grossly imprudent and careless" and therefore at the mercy of money-lenders. "Had it not been for the interference of Government, at least eight considerable estates would have been sold up within the last few years in the Raipur and Bilaspur districts alone." The rank and file of the aborigines, when they are found in tracts inhabited almost wholly by aborigines, "however poor may be their condition, are at least not degraded by the feeling of social inferiority." Thus the aborigines—the Gonds and others—in the opinion of Fuller, developed a feeling of social inferiority when they settled or continued to live among the Hindus. In the tracts almost wholly peopled by the aborigines, the Gonds and the Korkus were fairly good cultivators, but were already so far in the grip of the money-lenders as to have to patiently raise crops, the profits of which all went into the coffers of the latter. His description of the process of change of ownership

of land, from the Gond to the Kalar, makes it clear that the hope expressed by Forsyth, twenty years earlier, that the nefarious influence of the Kalars would end, was not fulfilled, owing perhaps to a change in excise policy and that extreme addiction to drink was still proving the bane of the Gonds and a boon to the Kalars. Fuller observes: "As a class, the aborigines are grossly addicted to drink, and this habit has been by far the most potent of the factors which have brought about their present condition. . . . I have come across Gond villages stupefied to a man with the effects of a previous night's debauch. There is not a report dealing with the condition of the Gonds which does not lay stress on the ruin which drink is bringing them, and it is to be apprehended that the Excise policy of Government has not tended to counteract this tendency. It has never been recognized that the circumstances of these tribes are peculiar and call for exceptional treatment."⁷ He quotes a long passage from the Provincial Administration Report for 1862-63 which shows that the drunkenness of the Gonds had increased very recently. The following piece from that quotation will be found relevantly interesting. "The Gonds are notoriously addicted to liquor, and it is apprehended that they are degenerating, and lapsing into savagery. Yet it has been often asserted that in a former generation they were not quite such drunkards, were a somewhat finer race, and that since the introduction of British rule their habits of inebriation have become aggravated." Fuller neither supports the contention nor perhaps controverts it. He simply points out that the remarks in the whole quotation were made with a view to supporting the excise policy of that day which aimed at substituting the "central distillery" for the "outstill" system.⁸ That intended policies may lead officials to find convenient data in favour of these is not unlikely. Nevertheless, it is more than doubtful if they would have gone to the extent of ascribing the deterioration of the Gonds to the British policy. We have quoted above the independent evidence of Forsyth, who was, quite clearly, not interested in the battle of policies. Forsyth re-

⁷ "Review of the Progress of the Central Provinces," pp. 28, 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

marked that there was, at the time of his tour, a recent change in excise policy. The change referred to seems to have been the substitution of the "central distillery" for the "outstill" system, which, by implication, was the previous policy. He attributed some part of the drink evil among the Gonds to the former policy and averred that the change in policy had not only proved a bane to the wicked Kalars, but was actually proving a boon to the simple Gonds. Perhaps Sir Richard Temple's opinion on the matter may not be considered to have the same value as Forsyth's for he was the head of the then administration, and was committed to the statements made in the Administration Report. However, for whatever worth it may have, let us quote what he remarked three or four years after the date of the said Administration Report. He wrote: "In former days, the bane of all these tribes has been the drinking of ardent spirits, and even wilful and deliberate drunkenness. But of late years radical changes in the management of the excise have removed many temptations from their way. And it is the concurrent testimony of all persons, European and Native, most competent to judge, that a marked reform in the habits of these people has been setting in of late."⁹ We may conclude from Fuller's statement that the policy for which the said Administration Report stood was reversed a few years before the year of his report, i.e. before 1892, and the "outstill" system was reinstated. The ups and downs in the conditions of the Gonds and other aborigines would thus appear to depend largely on the excise policy of Government, one type soaking them in liquor, another making it rather scarce. Fuller further quotes from a report of the Settlement Officer of the Hoshangabad district giving particulars about the aborigines of that district being expropriated by the Kalars in the usual way. Finally he observes: "Yet there are substantial proofs of a gradual improvement in condition. . . . In this Bordha tract [to which the quotation from the Settlement Officer's report relates] there were thirty years ago only 112 acres of land which had been held by Gond ryots for a sufficient length of time to warrant their being re-

9 Hislop: "Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces," p. vii.

corded as occupancy tenants. But at the present Settlement over 10,700 acres were found to have been held by the same men for over twelve years and were recorded as held in occupancy right. I can give similar statistics for the Mandla and Raipur districts."¹⁰ So much for the condition of the aboriginal peoples settled in villages preponderatingly or almost wholly peopled by them. We have seen previously that, about the aborigines settled in the Hindu villages, he opined that they had developed a feeling of social inferiority, and were occupying the most inferior position in the village economy. That, however, does not present the whole picture. For he observes: "They are not uncommonly met with in fairly prosperous circumstances, but the greater number have not risen above the condition of field labourers."¹¹ Regarding the sections of the aboriginal tribes that had not settled down to agriculture, and were living their primitive life of hunting and gathering in the hills and jungles, he observes: "Judging from appearances, these jungle tribes are the poorest of the poor. They go almost naked, and for a large part of the year, eat no grain whatever. But for them grain is rather a luxury than a necessity, and merely supplements the jungle roots and berries which are the main stay of their lives."¹²

In 1912, the District Gazetteer of Mandla revealed a different picture from what Fuller had painted in 1892. Only one-tenth of the total "malguzari" villages were owned by the Gonds except the Raj Gonds. It seems, in the period of twenty years, the Gonds lost many of their lands. The excise policy which was changed sometime before 1892 must have put such temptation in the way of the Gonds that their drunkenness must have tremendously increased. The Hindus, it is evident, must have taken full advantage of the situation. "Even the more honest and straightforward Hindus seem to think the simplicity of the Gond a fair mark; and the more disreputable class of adventurous Kalars, Mohammedans and others, who have from time to time found their way into the district, have in their dealings with the Gonds, as often as not,

¹⁰ Fuller: loc. cit., p. 31.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹² Ibid., pp. 31, 32.

descended to depths of villainy which, if Justice had her own, would have given the gaols more work to do." The chief characteristics of the Gonds are truthfulness, simplicity and cheerfulness. But when in contact with the Hindus "there is no more childlike and incorrigible liar and cheat than a Gond." They are improvident and intemperate. Among themselves their sexual morality is lax "though there is no laxity between their women and men of other castes." "As farm labourers they are noted for their faithfulness and obedience." When settled, they have taken to permanent cultivation and have shown themselves "though not so good cultivators as Hindus, at least able to improve."¹³ We have already quoted other views regarding the character of the Gonds as farm-labourers from which it can be seen that they are described also as hard-working and much in demand. Russell and Hiralal were of a different opinion regarding the Hinduized Gond's character. They thought that the more civilized Gonds retained the characteristics of their ruder brethren to a large extent, "though contact with the Hindus and the increased complexity of life have rendered them less guileless." They explained the timidity of the Gonds as being due to the British rule. "With the pacification of the country and the introduction of a strong and equable system of government by the British, these wild marauders soon settled down and became the timid and in-offensive labourers which they now are."¹⁴ Rowney went even further, and considering their savagery before their contact with the spirit-sellers, opined that even the latter's conspicuous presence amidst them was not an unmixed evil.¹⁵

The Kawars, who numbered 2,87,000 in 1931, are largely Hinduized, 96 per cent of them having been shown as Hindus. The observations of Mr. Wills regarding the Paikra Kanwars of the Bilaspur Zamindaris have been quoted previously. From them it is seen how the Paikra Kanwars have greatly benefited by their contact with the Hindus, not only as regards agricultural operations but also in respect of social decency. The description given leaves no doubt about the

13 "District Gazetteer of Mandla," pp. 62, 68, 69.

14 Op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 119, 47.

15 Rowney: "Wild Tribes of India," pp. 13, 14.

Paikra Kanwars being a very vigorous community. Russell and Hiralal recorded that the Kawars as a whole were using liquor sparingly at their panchayat meetings.¹⁶ Years ago, Col. Dalton found them "a clean, well-to-do, industrious people, living in comfortable, carefully-constructed and healthily-kept houses and well dressed."¹⁷ Mr. Wills makes it clear that the improvement brought about among the Kawars by Hindu contact is not a peculiar phenomenon confined to the better class of aborigines, but is met with even among such low classes as the Panka.¹⁸

The Bhils, who numbered more than 20,00,000, had only thirteen Christians among them, and at best a few others from among the thirty thousand and odd who were classified under "all religions." More than 77 per cent of the total were returned as Hindus. Col. Kincaid, describing them in 1879, stated that in many villages they were the guardians and watchmen, and as such had village-lands assigned to them and were entitled to certain customary dues. He found that they married their daughters at twelve years of age. They were very suspicious of their wives. Their houses, therefore, were never close together, but always some distance apart. He thought that, as two-thirds of their complaints originated in disputes about women, they had some reason to be so suspicious.¹⁹ James Campbell's description of the Khandesh Bhils implies that not all of them had settled down to an orderly life. Even those who had given up the life of disorder had not made much advance. Ignorance, carelessness, and love of liquor had placed them under the yoke of the Gujar Kunbis, whose landless servants many of them had tended to become. Even as a small landholder or as a labourer, the Bhil, though capable of being an efficient worker, had not learnt to earn a good wage.²⁰ Yet Rowney considered most of them to be so far adept in agriculture as not to be "easily distinguishable from the other cultivating classes around them."²¹ In 1930

16 Op. cit., Vol. III, p. 402.

17 Op. cit., p. 137.

18 "Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Zamindari Estates of the Bilaspur District," p. 11.

19 "Journal of the Anthropological Institute," Vol. IX, pp. 398, 401.

20 "Bombay Gazetteer," Vol. XII, p. 83.

21 Op. cit., pp. 28, 29.

the Bombay Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes Committee, which was presided over by Mr. O. H. B. Starte, and of which Mr. A. V. Thakkar and (the Hon'ble) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar were two of the members, thought that the problem of the aborigines had arisen out of their isolation from the main body of the community. Unlike that of the depressed classes, the isolation of the aborigines was due to geographical conditions combined with their lack of desire to utilize whatever opportunities presented themselves.²² Mr. D. Symington, on the other hand, thinks that their problem arises out of their contacts with the main body of the community. He observes: "Where their geographical position keeps them beyond the reach of the outside world, as in the Akrani *mahal*, they are happy and independent; but in the places, now all too many, where they are in constant contact with more educated people, they are degraded, timid and exploited." He records the replies he got from the Bhils when he discussed their drink-habit and their custom of putting liquor into the mouths of their new-born babies, and their orgies at death-rites. They make it clear that the Bhils realized that higher caste people did not do these things, and yet got on well, and that they would do similarly if liquor shops were closed down. Further on in the report Mr. Symington observes: "The Chopda settlements have a mixed population and the Bhils profit by the example of their Rajput Kunbi and other neighbours, both in their methods of agriculture and the general management of their affairs."²³ Thus, his opinion about the unadulterated evil effects of contact with higher castes, is only one-sided. The Starte committee and Mr. Symington each have stressed only one aspect of the situation. Contact is necessary and desirable, but it must be supervised and not uncontrolled.

Regarding the Katkaris, it will suffice here to quote the considered opinion of Mr. A. N. Weling, who made a comprehensive study of their life recently. He says: "While the *Katkari* is thus imperceptibly but surely tending towards the

²² "Report of the Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes Committee," Bombay, p. 4.

²³ "Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in the Province of Bombay," 1939, pp. 1, 63, 87.

standards of *Kunbis* and others, these village castes on their part are more and more inclined to extend the hand of friendship." This position is, no doubt, the consequence of the *Katkari's* adaptability and versatility. "He can successfully practise multifarious occupations, and although he had to give up his former occupation of catechu-making, or gathering of forest produce, owing to an increase in forest conservancy, he could, with equal skill, be a successful agriculturist, field-labourer, charcoal-maker or road-mender." The Hindus, on their part, as a result of the closer association brought by the change in the *Katkari's* life, are changing their attitude towards him. "The Hindus no more think the *Katkari*, that wandering savage-looking criminal and sorcerer, to be dangerous to society. He is not as bad as that, but can be a useful addition to the village community. The old distrustful and uncongenial atmosphere round the *Katkari* has changed and his prospects are eased. And no wonder if we find the *Katkari* gradually substituting the *Kunbi*, the latter vacating the field for multiple reasons, and the former with his inherited and developed culture forms, culture accessories, and culture potential, replacing him."²⁴

It is seen from the above description of the life and conditions of a number of the so-called aboriginal tribes of various temperaments, and different reactions towards the Hindus, that most of them have profited by their contact with the Hindus. Their religious beliefs have come to include some conception of a supreme God at the least. They have become conscious of the need of education. Reform in some of their customs has been seen by them to be urgently needed. Some of them have made conscientious attempts at uprooting the drink-evil from among themselves. Not rarely have they taken up the Hindu festivals and thus brought themselves into closer association with the Hindus. Sometimes adoption of a Hindu festival has led to the addition of a social occasion without its erstwhile accompaniment of liquor, though this has not occurred as much as one would have liked. Invariably the contact has led to improvement, which varies from being very slight to very considerable, according to the capability of the

²⁴ "The *Katkaris*," pp. 149, 152, 153.

tribes in methods of agriculture. The aboriginal tribes, as a whole, have grown in numbers; and there is no reason to believe that the Hinduized sections have not contributed their due quota to that increase. There is a tendency to claim an ever higher status in the hierarchy of caste, with the concomitant willingness to suffer some inconveniences regarding their older practices. Altogether the contact has created a desire to level up among the Hinduized sections, the sincerity of which we have no grounds to doubt. The picture thus presented is vastly different from the one that is characterized by moral depression or loss of nerve. That some discomfort to some sections, positive pain to others, and unmitigated loss to some, must have been caused, is quite clear from the accounts. But before we credit all that as a grievance to the account of Hindu contact, we must ponder over the fact that the process of breaking up and remaking of groups had been in progress for many centuries, and that internal migrations had been causing a good deal of wrenching in the naturally pleasant social surroundings. In short, we must remember that the so-called independent or semi-independent tribes of today have not all been tribes in working order as units for a very long time, and that some of them may be merely derelicts from older and more co-ordinated units. Further, within the larger tribes of today, there must have been individuals with differing abilities as there must have been units with varying capacities for adaptation. Some part of the discomfort is, no doubt, the direct consequence of the very nature of caste-society. The largest part of the distress is due to the loss of land, which, as we shall presently show, was facilitated by the British system of revenue and law. This system was introduced against some of the most earnest appeals made by very able and sympathetic administrators. And even when official after official, and report upon report, drew pointed attention to the evil wrought by this system, the high command of the British administrative machinery failed to rise to the situation, unless rudely shaken by violent disturbances—and then, too, in a piecemeal fashion. Divested of the potentiality of land-grabbing, Hindu contact would have been nothing but an unadulterated boon to the so-called aboriginal tribes.

Even O'Malley acknowledges to some extent the truth of the above conclusion. For, about the adoption of Hinduism by the so-called aborigines, he says: "It is the first step to a more sober life, for Hinduism discourages immoderate indulgence in liquor, and it involves the recognition of the standards of a civilized morality."²⁵ But as against this improvement he weighs certain evil effects too. He observes: "But it also impairs solidarity of the tribe; it tends to destroy the sanctions on which morality rested and the taboos which were its safeguards; it involves a loss of personal dignity and freedom. The unreclaimed aboriginal has no inferiority complex, but is sturdy and independent, acknowledging no Hindu as his superior; he practises adult marriage, and he is free from the Hindu taboos on food and drink. The admission of the superiority of Hinduism is the beginning of a decline of independence, and he eventually sinks to the level of the depressed classes, is tied to the shackles of the caste system with its irrational conventions and dietary restrictions, and copies the less desirable customs of the lower castes, such as child marriage."²⁶

Mr. Elwin, too, thinks that as a result either of reform movements under the leadership of the Hinduized sections of these tribes, or of the influence of the school, the abolition of certain valuable tribal customs and the adoption of certain evil practices is preached and tends to be carried out. The school, with its teacher, who believes in untouchability, helps in the degradation of untouchables, and sometimes leads to "the creation of new untouchable communities like the Lohar, Ghasia and Agaria, and a lower position of women." He further attributes to the influence of the school the introduction of child marriage, which is "particularly pernicious, and is one of the reasons for the light hold of the marriage-tie in semi-civilized areas."²⁷ He gives us as the purport of a Gond reformer's preaching in Mandla in 1936 the following: "Everything that the Hindus despised must be abandoned. The great Karma dance, the one surviving instrument of Gond culture, must stop. Men and women must not sing the 'im-

²⁵ "Modern India and the West," p. 736.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ "Loss of Nerve," p. 29.

moral' Dadaria together. In practice this meant that all singing and dancing would stop—for the Gond always likes to be on the safe side. Pigs and chickens, the only tax-free domestic animals, must be destroyed. The Gond must be teetotal. Women must be put in purdah. The rules of untouchability must be strictly observed. Children should be married young in Hindu fashion. Cows must not be yoked to the plough." The movement, he says, spread like wildfire.²⁸ In a booklet, one Badalshah Bhai of Chindwara, put forward his ideas of reform under the caption of "Sanatan Gondi." The essence of it, as summarized by Mr. Elwin, is as follows: "Monkeys must be protected for they are the close companions of the gods. Brahmins should be employed to recite the Satyanarayan songs, and marriages should be celebrated according to Vedic rites. Marriage with the mother's brother's daughter, a universal custom among Gonds, is forbidden. The highest virtue is to serve sadhus and Brahmins and honour the cow. Women are like cows. They must be taught. They cannot control themselves. In this Kaliyug they have become mad. They leave their people and go to others. Such should never be taken back." The book also preaches, as pointed out by him, promotion of education, jettisoning of the lower spirits, and installing in their place as the sole object of worship the supreme Bara Deo, and vehemently calls on the Gonds to take a receipt for any payment they make. He does not tell us what success, if any, the preachings of Badalshah had.

Mr. Elwin's comments on the work of Badalshah Bhai are interesting both for their comprehension and omission. The only word of praise he has is contained in the sentence: "There is often, as in Badalshah's movement, a genuine desire for a new standard of morality." As to certain omissions in the list of reforms he remarks: "Badalshah Bhai has nothing to say about liquor or dancing, nor does he say explicitly that women should be kept in purdah or children married young. But these things are probably assumed."²⁹ This inference is certainly gratuitous, and manifests Mr. Elwin's pronounced prejudice against tribal reformers. One who harkens back to

²⁸ "The Baiga," pp. 513, 514.

²⁹ "Loss of Nerve," pp. 29, 40; 41, 42, 43.

Vedic rites of marriage is far more likely to support continuance of the practice of adult marriage and free movement of women than otherwise. At least the Hindu Vedicists would do that. We have, therefore, no reason to infer otherwise, unless there is distinct evidence to show that the man was against the prevailing Gond practice of adult marriage and free movement of women. That Mr. Elwin has not a word to say about the two most important exhortations that the man made to his people, viz., promotion of education and the taking of receipt, is only a further indication of his prejudice. Omission of any reference to Badalshah's insistence on education is essentially doctrinal and therefore not very surprising. Already we have remarked that Mr. Elwin does not like the social uplift movement of the Hos of Kolhan. We may point out here that he considers it to have "an equally mischievous effect" as the deliberate attempts at suppression of traits of tribal culture by Christian missions or rumours started by interested parties. The Hos' programme of uplift was aimed at suppression of dancing which necessitated late hours, and as Dr. Majumdar has pointed out, was accompanied by excessive drinking and boisterous revelry so that a "Ho-village at dead of night rings with Bacchanalian revelries." It also forbade women to work in the bazaars and called upon the Hos to become teetotal. He likens even such movements, sponsored by a gathering of representative and educated persons of the tribes, to mass neuroses.³⁰

It seems everything savouring of the Hindu upsets Mr. Elwin to whom the reformer's call to the Gonds not to yoke cows to the plough is in the same category as asking them to marry their children very young. Now this advice regarding the yoking of the cows has a very important bearing on the agricultural life of the people. Mr. Bell, who was a great sympathizer of the Gonds and others like them and no partisan of the Hindus, pointed out the Gond practice of yoking cows as one of the causes of the deterioration of their breed of cattle.³¹ Stoppage of that practice, though as an act of religious belief taken up from the Hindus, is thus, far from

³⁰ Elwin: "The Baiga," p. 513; "Loss of Nerve," p. 38; D. N. Majumdar: "Modern Review," 1925, p. 287.

³¹ "Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Mandla District" (1911), p. 22.

being an evil, a desirable end, for which thanks may be given to the Hindu belief.

We shall examine the four main charges against Hinduization, viz., untouchability, lowering of the position of woman, the introduction of child-marriage and the suppression of tribal songs and dances. As regards O'Malley's contention about loss of freedom, we have already seen to what extent, and in what sense it is partially true of some of the peoples, and have concluded that on the whole that evil is largely connected with loss of land. Of the four evils attributed to Hinduization, and taken up here for discussion, two, as we have seen, are attributed by both O'Malley and Mr. Elwin, while the remaining two have been put forward only by Mr. Elwin.

To begin with untouchability, the evidence presented above regarding the position of the Hinduized sections of the so-called aboriginal tribes is enough to refute the charge that these people sink to the lowest level in the Hindu society. We have noticed that quite a large number of these tribes have secured a status higher than that of the lowest castes and a fair number even that of higher castes. We have quoted the observations of Mr. Shooberth regarding the movements among the Shudras and the untouchable classes of the C. P. and Berar which stoutly refuse to recognize untouchability and assert in unequivocal tone the equality of the people concerned with the so-called clean castes. We have also quoted authorities proving the existence of well-defined and fairly militant sects of the Satnamis and the Kabirpanthis which are there for any tribe to take recourse to to avoid the stigma of untouchability. The influence of such militant sects for the moral uplift of the tribes has been admitted by Mr. Lacey in the case of the Chota Nagpur tribes. Add to this the militant attitude of the so-called depressed classes, organized on an all-India basis. Consider the modification that may have been brought about as a result of the attitude of the Indian National Congress and more recently even of the Hindu Mahasabha. Altogether, the atmosphere is too much charged with anti-untouchability for any new classes to be treated as untouchables because a few school teachers by their action demonstrate their acceptance of

untouchability or because a Gond reformer in Mandla or Chindwara orders its observance. None of the organized tribal reform-movements seem to have advocated untouchability. The Ho gathering surely did not ask the Hos to observe untouchability. Nor evidently has the Gond Mahasabha exhorted its members to countenance it. The Bhil association of West Khandesh too does not seem to be interested in a particular attitude to it. It appears that the whole argument which attributes degradation and untouchability among new classes of aborigines to Hinduization rests on either misunderstanding or misrepresentation.

For the assertion that the position of woman becomes or will become lower among the Hinduized tribalists than it is among the uncivilized ones, there is hardly any evidence excepting perhaps the resolutions of the Ho gathering and the Gond Mahasabha. The latter forbade dancing for women. It must be borne in mind that prohibition of dancing alone cannot lower the position of woman. As a matter of fact the idea behind the prohibition would appear to be to chasten the sex-morals of the community. Some observers have stated that, excepting a few war-dances and others, the associations of many tribal dances are sexual.³² And Dr. Majumdar has testified to the Bacchanalian revelries which accompany midnight dances and songs, that fittingly express the inner state of sexual license within the Ho society.³³ Under the circumstances, to prohibit dancing for women is not necessarily to lower their position. It no doubt would have been better if they had stopped only mixed dancing and not gone to the length of forbidding totally to women all dancing. Further it is not quite certain that this attitude toward dancing by females will either remain or will actually influence the people very much. For the interest in dancing in general and Indian folk-dancing in particular has been recently aroused to such an extent that even girls and ladies of high-caste Hindu society are taking to it. Besides, dancing of a sort—ritual and festive—by women, exists among most lower and even some high castes. Under such circumstances how can the appeal to

³² "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," p. 105.

³³ "Modern Review," 1925, p. 287.

stop the practice of dancing by ladies succeed? Indeed, the time is not far off when some kind of Indian dance may be introduced into the schools as a part and parcel of physical education. The Hos resolved that their women should not work in the bazaars. This coupled with Badalshah Bhais' statement that women are required to be taught and controlled are the only indications of a likely change for the worse in the position of woman. It was clearly pointed out by Dr. Majumdar in his article on social reform among the Hos, that the Ho males were very lazy and that their womenfolk did an extraordinary amount of daily work. He described the men as weak, lazy and worthless. As a consequence, there was much laxity in sex matters, and the Ho society had to tolerate irregular sex relations. If the Hos therefore decided that their women should not work in the bazaar, it not only lightened their burden of work but also made for better sex morals. Because women were prevented from working in the bazaars they were not confined to the house. They were still to work in the fields with their men. Stopping of work in the bazaars can hardly be called introduction of purdah or seclusion of women. The lower-caste woman is much more hard-worked without adequate compensation in social position than her middle-class sister. We should rather rejoice over taking off some of her burden than discover in it lowering of position or introduction of purdah. If schools for boys should lead to any idea about inferiority of women, there are or there will be schools for girls, even hostels for them, with their complement of female teachers to give a concrete lesson in the equality of sexes. At a time when Hindu woman has organized herself for her recognition on a footing of equality, it is too much to suggest that the fiat of a Gond individual or the remarks of a few school teachers will depress the position of woman among the Hinduized aborigines. Far from being true, this fear about the lowering of woman's status is, as a matter of fact, belied by the reforms actually carried out by some of the tribes. We have already quoted a statement of Tallents, the superintendent of the Census of Bihar and Orissa for 1921, to the effect that the Santals have positively ruled that their property should descend through the female line

rather than be inherited by distant relatives on the male side, in case there is no son to inherit it. Nor is the implication that among the non-Hinduized aborigines there is perfect equality between the sexes true. The Baigas believe that whereas men may sleep on a cot, women are "compelled by the gods to lie on mother earth."³⁴

That child marriage or pre-puberty marriage may come to be practised by the Hinduized tribalists is unfortunately true. But we shall show that it is not such an evil as it is supposed to be, if practised by the so-called aborigines, or that it is at least not an unmixed evil. Sir E. A. Gait propounded, years ago, a theory of the origin of pre-puberty marriage, in which the main contention was that pre-puberty marriage was an innovation of those pre-Aryan inhabitants of India, who had come into contact with the Aryans in India, and had desired to secure their good opinion. He postulated that the early Aryans in India practised adult marriage without tolerating pre-marital sex intercourse, while the pre-Aryans of India, though they also married adult females, allowed pre-marital license. As pre-marital license was abhorred by the Aryans the pre-Aryans, in order to gain their approval, wanted to put a stop to the practice of pre-marital license. The solution to their problem they found in the innovation of pre-puberty marriage, which stopped pre-marital sex intercourse. The Aryans were supposed by Gait to have taken up the custom from their pre-Aryan converts.³⁵ We do not suggest that the theory is quite correct or that it is generally accepted. We only want to bring to the notice of our readers the close connection between suppression of pre-marital licence and pre-puberty marriage, which was very clearly seen years ago. Gait remarked about the Chota Nagpur tribes, that the late age of marriage amongst them was due, to a large extent, to their pre-nuptial sex communism.³⁶ That pre-marital licence is tolerated amongst most of the so-called aboriginal tribes of the tract we are considering is a fact known to all the anthropologists and sociologists who have any knowledge of India. Excepting only a few tribes,

³⁴ "Mandla District Gazetteer," p. 76.

³⁵ "Census of India, 1911, India Report," p. 270.

³⁶ "Census of India, 1901, Bengal Report," p. 262.

among most of them there is the institution of the bachelors' and spinsters' dormitories. Bachelors and spinsters of the village, instead of sleeping in the huts or houses of their respective parents or guardians, all go to the dormitory to sleep, many a time there being separate places for bachelors and spinsters. Among some there is supposed to be some supervision over the spinsters' dormitory. But most writers are agreed that the institution leads to rather promiscuous sex relations between the boys and the girls. It is thus that pre-marital sex intercourse is tolerated amongst those tribes which have the institution of dormitories. It is also tolerated almost with equal nonchalance among those tribes which do not have the institution.³⁷

When pre-marital intercourse is not in any way condemned but actually tolerated, needless to say it is very difficult to state the age at which sex relations between boys and girls begin. Mr. Elwin's monograph on the Baiga, with its biographies of fifteen Baiga males and females, provides some material to ponder over. Most of these Baigas would appear to be non-Hinduized. Four of the males narrate how when they were between 10 and 12 years old they had forced sex intercourse with girls, apparently of their ages. A woman tells us how, when as a married woman she was all alone in the house, three boys "attacked her."³⁸ Another male, whose life-history is given, had his first sex-experience when he was only nine years old. A boy is considered to be *hushiyar* or "clever," i. e., competent to do all, when he is fourteen.³⁹ We may conclude from this that sex intercourse may start before children are fourteen years old. For a people, among whom unregulated sex life begins by fourteen and may begin even two or three years earlier, pre-puberty marriage is hardly an innovation in respect of the age when sex life begins. Partly pre-puberty marriage is condemned because it involves strain through early sexual activity on the organism which requires, and ought to have, all the psychic and physical energy it is

37 Forsyth: loc. cit., p. 149; Risley: loc. cit., pp. 98, 444, 450; Dr. N. Majumdar in "Indian Population Problems" (Report and Proceedings of the Second All-India Population and First Family Hygiene Conference), p. SA 70; "Mandla District Gazetteer," p. 68; "Tribes and Castes of the C. P., III, pp. 130-31; "Census of India, 1911, Bombay Report," p. 237; Griyson: "The Maria Gonds of Bastar," p. 257.

38 See biographies of Lahakat, Rawan, Pochlu, Ketu and Bathar.

39 Loc. cit., p. 232.

capable of, in the service of its growth. If under the existing customs of the aborigines the energy is already being dissipated in early sex relations, one cannot see how early marriage alters the situation at all, much less how it worsens it. Early marriage then among such communities may not be considered to lead to new consequences. On the other hand, to the extent pre-puberty marriage curtails promiscuous sex relations it helps in the check of venereal diseases, which, we are told, are latterly spreading among these people.

One hardly expects a bad effect on the stability of marriage because of the introduction of pre-puberty marriage. But as is clear from the views of Mr. Elwin, quoted above, he has stated it as his opinion that looseness of the marriage-tie results from pre-puberty marriage. Perhaps he has adopted the point of view of some sexologists, and perhaps of the Baiga Dhan Singh. The latter while narrating his history is reported to have stated that he was married when he was about eighteen and that he had sex relations with his future wife before he was married. His words bear quotation: "Before we were married I went with her to the forest to get mahua. There I went to her; it was the first time I ever did it. It was a good thing I knew my wife before marriage; we knew we would suit each other, and we have remained together for our whole life." This first sex experience he had when he was nine. He tells us that since then he came to love her and married her in the end.⁴⁰ We shall leave aside the experience and judgment of Dhan Singh as rather of doubtful value. Some sexologists opine that some sex experience before marriage leads to stability of marriage union by enabling the persons to judge of mutual suitability in sex matters. The investigations of Hamilton and Davis and the researches of Professor Terman into the marital behaviour of a number of Americans have not borne out the hopes of these sexologists. Pre-marital sex experience, whether it enables people to judge about their sexual compatibility or not, does not show a significant relation to marital happiness.⁴¹

⁴⁰ "The Baiga," pp. 663, 232.

⁴¹ Lewis M. Terman: "Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness," (1938) pp. 324-330.

Whatever the sense and the agency in which and through which pre-puberty marriage is supposed to lead to looseness of the marriage-tie, let us try to know the state of the marriage-tie among the so-called aborigines, who have not yet come to practise pre-puberty marriage or to value very highly pre-nuptial chastity. In another connection we have quoted the statement from the District Gazetteer of Mandla that the sexual morality of Gonds among themselves is lax. Russell and Hiralal⁴² opine that the enforcement of rules of sexual morality is comparatively recent, and the following observation of Low in the Balaghat District Gazetteer supports the contention. "It is difficult to say what is not a legal marriage from a Gond point of view; but, in spite of this laxity, abductions are frequent, and Col. Bloomfield mentions one particularly noteworthy case where the abductor, an unusually ugly Gond with a hare-lip, was stated by the complainant to have taken off first the latter's aunt, then his sister and finally his wife." Among the Bhils the marriage is stated to be loose. A married woman may go to her lover at any time, "if he is willing to keep her and to repay the husband his marriage expenses." Mr. Symington speaks of "their constant habit of eloping with each other's wives" as a harmful element in the social life of the hill tribes.⁴³

But more illuminating than a number of similar statements is the evidence provided by the life-histories of the fifteen Baigas which Mr. Elwin has given. Mahatu ran away, when he was fairly young, with a married girl; she, after some time, ran away with another man. He bewitched another girl who also ran away from him after a year. He married a third girl who lived with him till she was a mother of six children and then ran away with and married another man. Of course Mahatu married again. Yogi Dewar was married rather late at forty; but he made up for the late start by busy-ing himself during the next three years with procuring wives. His efforts were very successful as he gathered together six wives in all with whom he lived happily. Yet, when he was about one hundred years old—he is stated to be one hundred

⁴² Op. cit., Vol. III, p. 131.

⁴³ "Census of India, 1911, Bombay Report," p. 237; "Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in the Province of Bombay," p. 3.

and five at the time of the enquiry—he married his daughter's daughter. Lahakat boasts that before he was twenty-five he seduced fifty different girls. Pachlu married a girl older than himself and congratulates himself on his resolve to marry because she has remained "more or less faithful." Yet he had once arranged to meet a married girl, but was deprived of his pleasures by the shrewd husband of that girl. When his wife got old he married another, who left him after five or six years. Then he married his wife's sister's son's daughter. Bahadur, the intrepid, made love to a married girl by giving her little presents of fruit and parched gram, though he was himself married, and soon succeeded in bringing her to his house as his mistress and paid off her husband. Ketu, who was forced by his father to start cohabitation with his wife, though the latter was rather young, found that another married girl liked him much. She ultimately forced herself on him and he had to buy her husband off. Bansi, a rather unfortunate man, kept three women besides his wife, but the former did not stay with him long. Dhan Singh's second wife, while the first was alive, left him about five days after her marriage and he philosophized over her departure. Let us now hear the female story. Phulmat, who was forcibly married at ten, liked another man when she was about fifteen and went to live with him. Six years later, after the birth of a child, she left him as she was troubled by her co-wife. She then lived with his younger brother. Baihar, when she was fourteen years old, was forced to sexual intercourse by her brother in the jungle. Later on a man married her forcibly. Her description of herself at that age is instructive and we quote it here: "I was very pretty. Many men wept for me and sent me messages. When will you come to me? Why don't you talk to me? What present would you like?" She does not seem to have succumbed to these temptations. But once when she was all alone in the house three boys "attacked" her. She told her husband what had happened and in anger they left for another place. Later on they moved to her original village. Her confessions about her life of this period are worth quoting. She says: "There every man was soon dying with love for me. I made friends with two of them. That year I had an-

other son. Who knows who his father was?" Soon after, her husband died and six months later she married another man. Though she was happy with him she soon made friends with another. She was caught in *flagrante delicto* by her husband, who afterwards beat her. At night she crept out of the house and ran off with her lover. Later on, her last husband came and chastized her so effectively that she gave up flirting. When the third husband died she married another man, who also died in three years. She had two fairly grown-up sons and a daughter. She wanted to marry a fifth husband. Her sons left her, evidently in protest, and she took her daughter and married a fifth man. He too soon died and she abandoned all idea of further marriage. Hironda's father betrothed her at thirteen and married her off the next year. Her husband after loving her very much for two years, began to spend his nights with another girl. She remonstrated with him but to no purpose. After waiting for a year, she made friends with another man and planned to run away. In the meanwhile, her husband's new love died. She abandoned her plan of elopement and lived happily with her husband. When her husband died, leaving her behind with five children, she would have liked to marry again. But she complains, "Who would have me with five children?" Even while her husband was living, once when she was on her way to her brother's house two men, having met her on the way, had thrown her down and "gone to her." Mr. Elwin describes another woman, Mahi by name, thus: "She is very charming, flirtatious, and 'modern'. . . . She is at present married but has declared that she wants a change, and that if any one else would like to marry her, they have only to let her know." Baisakin, who was married when she was twenty, tells us that her husband soon after went in search of another wife. After a year he came back and took her away. She became very ill and when she recovered she found that her husband would not give her proper food. She ran back to her brother and after a year, making love to a landlord, went to live with him, though he had his wife. But the landlord, too, soon stopped giving her proper food and started abusing and beating her. As on former occasions she ran back to her brother. This time a

famous magician-priest made love to and kept her. She had him happily all to herself. After his death she lived all alone for two years. Then one day she met a magician-priest in the jungle whom she liked. They got on well and used to meet often. As the village began to suspect their relationship they were asked to marry.

The picture of the marriage-tie presented by this evidence, we think, will not be considered by many to be very flattering. If the marriage-tie among other tribes is approximately similar to the picture presented by the Baiga it would be admitted that there is nothing very stable in the marriage relations prevalent among them. Actually among some of them, the Konds for example,⁴⁴ the tie is not at all loose. Surely the marriage-tie in all classes of the Hindu society is much more stable than among the Baiga and similar tribalists. The fear that the marriage-tie will become looser among the tribalists by their adoption of early marriage as a result of Hinduization thus does not stand to reason.

Dance in the Hindu society till very recently had associations which were not considered respectable. Today, though many society ladies and an increasing number of society girls are taking lessons and offering performances in dancing, the old prejudice cannot be supposed to have been completely overcome. Yet there are signs that the general interest in folk-culture that has been aroused during the last thirty years is gaining strength and folk-dance bids fair to be reinstated to a recognized position both as an art of expression as well as a healthy physical activity. We may shortly see its introduction into schools. Aboriginal dancing, as already pointed out, has sensual associations. It provides the sexes with an opportunity for illicit intercourse.⁴⁵ With such a background, as the Hinduized tribalists begin to approach the standard of purity of the higher Hindu castes it is likely that they may drop their dances. We have stated earlier that the Hinduized Kols have not or, till recently, had not given up their dancing. The Gonds prohibited only mixed singing and dancing which, according to them, had some tinge of im-

⁴⁴ "District Gazetteer of Angul" (1908), pp. 55, 56, 70.

⁴⁵ "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," p. 105.

morality and the Hos forbade the dance only to their women. The Mandla Baigas, who have been open to outside influence for a long time and whom Mr. Elwin contrasts with the Baigas of Pandaria and Kawardha, the latter being the really full-blooded jungle ones, freely indulge in dancing and show "no sign of false shame about *Karma* or any other dancing."⁴⁶ It is clear from this that the prohibition of all dancing is not or has not been a common reaction of tribalists on Hinduization. And now that interest in folk-culture in general and folk-dance in particular has been aroused to the extent it is, we do not think that all tribal dances would be prohibited by the Hinduized tribalists. Some of the mixed dances may be stopped, others would be practised and some of them will be adopted in the total complex which is arising, called Indian culture. We do not mean to suggest that all that is thought to be valuable by somebody or the other will be retained. Some valuable items may come to be lost in the process of assimilation into a larger complex along with the less valuable elements. But we have no reason to believe that the total gain will be small.

Hinduization of tribalists need not be accompanied by evil results of the kind postulated by O'Malley and by Mr. Elwin. This does not mean that there are no problems connected with the treatment to be given to the so-called aborigines. But before we can consider these problems and their suggested solutions we must study the policy of the Government towards them and the efforts made to implement it.

⁴⁶ W. V. Grigson: "Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District," p. 27.

CHAPTER IV

So-called Aborigines and Indian Government

THE first tribe to come within the purview of the British was the Paharias of the Rajmahal Hills. We have previously mentioned how their violent retaliation against the Hindu zamindars brought them into clash with the British arms and that they were subdued by a combination of military operations and pacification. Here we must go into the details of the method of pacification, as it was the first serious attempt made by the British in India to deal with the so-called aborigines. The terms of pacification were such as a turbulent tribe alone could get. The leaders were to be granted sanads, and they were to report all outbreaks. The leaders of those living near the lines of communication were to be paid a fixed sum to protect the mail runners. The payment is described by competent authorities as "a bribe pure and simple as in Musulman days." At the foot of the hills, lands were granted to retired or disabled soldiers, and thus a ring-fence of military-minded people was created round the marauding Paharias. When the charge of the tract was given to Augustus Cleveland, further concessions were made. Cleveland allotted pensions to the leaders and sub-leaders and assigned them some additional duties. They were to report all crimes in the villages under their control, use their influence to prevent a breach of the peace, and assist the authorities when called upon to do so. The pensions amounted to fifteen thousand rupees annually, and continued to be paid for nearly a hundred years. Slowly working through the corps that he had raised, he came to appoint a court from among the officers of the corps for purposes of justice. Seeing its utility he approached Government to withdraw the Rajmahal Hills tract from the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts. Thus it was that in 1782 the Rajmahal Hills tract was withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts. Cleveland constituted the hereditary leaders of the

tribe called Sardars into a sessions court which was to meet twice a year and try all offences. The council came to be known as the Hill Assembly. None but the Hill Assembly had the power to inflict or rescind capital punishment. The Collector might modify or reverse decisions of the Assembly in other matters on appeal.¹ The Hill Assembly under Cleveland's inspiring guidance seems to have taken its duties seriously, though the kind of thing was new to the Paharia Sardars. The ceremony and formality accompanying the session made "a lasting and ineffable impression." The objective of internal justice and peace thus achieved through the creation of the Hill Assembly, Cleveland solved the other and, perhaps the more important, problem of encroachment on their lands by the hated "foreigners." The lands held by the Paharias were formed into a government estate, held by them direct from Government and free from rent. These measures induced those Paharia chiefs, who had still held out, to join in and accept the rule of the British, which, for all practical purposes, was their own rule. The whole tract, thus unified and specially treated, came to be known as Daman-i-Koh.

Now that the peaceful settlement of the turbulent Paharias was achieved, it was seen that the method of securing it had made it impossible for influence from the people outside the charmed circle to reach them any longer. Cleveland, on the other hand, was convinced that there was no hope for advance of the Paharias in the arts of civilization, unless they were brought into close contact with the advanced peoples of the plains. This could be done only by persuading the Paharias to descend from their hills to the fertile land at their foot. And Cleveland had formulated his plans to accomplish this, when unfortunately he died a sudden and premature death in 1784.

The work of the Hill Assembly went on smoothly with the help of the rules which he had drawn up for the conduct of its meetings. These rules were made law by Regulation I of 1796. We have seen how the tract was administered by the

¹ This account is based on Bradley-Birt's, "The Story of an Indian Upland." Altogether different is the version of the powers of the Hill Assembly as it appears in the "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas."

Collector without any of the regular laws of the British Government, making his own rules for the conduct of affairs. The Collector's sole authority would appear to be the fact that the tract was withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts. In essence, therefore, the tract was a non-Regulation area till 1796. The Company's government of Bengal during those days till 1834 was carried on through the Regulations of Fort William. As in 1782 the Paharia tract, later known as Daman-i-Koh, was exempted from the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts and consequently put under the sole charge of the Collector, we can call it a non-Regulation tract and regard it as the precursor and the prototype of the non-Regulation tracts, the Scheduled Districts, the Backward Tracts or the Excluded Areas. The tract continued to be so specially administered under the Regulation of 1796 till 1827, when Regulation I of the year repealed Regulation I of 1796 and put the Daman-i-Koh more or less on a par with other areas. The Paharias were thus brought under the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts, with some exceptions in their favour. The exceptions were sufficiently large to leave the administration of justice practically into the hands of the tribesmen themselves. This state of affairs continued for nearly fifty years, during which period, as we shall presently see, other Indian tribes had forced themselves within the horizon of the Indian Government.

The events leading to the withdrawal of Regulation I of 1796 are very instructive to all students of the problem of the so-called aborigines. From the account given by Bradley-Birt it is clear, first of all, that the system had succeeded pre-eminently because of the personality and sympathy of Cleveland. The system, if continued in the same form, was doubly costly to the Government, which, receiving no rent from the land, had to pay fairly large stipends to the land-holders as a bribe to keep the peace. The history of those land-holders declared them to be a race of robbers and free-booters to any one who had not experienced the same difficulty of subduing them to peace and had not the same sympathy as Augustus Cleveland, particularly when the power of the Company's Government in Bengal had increased. The system of justice, which placed almost unlimited power in the hands of the wildest people of

Bengal, required for its proper working constant and vigilant guidance at the hands of the highest officer, the Collector of the district. This was not available, for some unknown reason, except that the officers of the period were very slack in their administrative duties, for more than thirty years. Only one officer showed some interest, and it was during his regime that the rules were made law as Regulation I of 1796.² The natural result of this neglect about an institution that was young and in the hands of wild and undisciplined people, quite new to it, was that "the assemblies fell into disrepute among the hill-men, and many of the Sardars refused to attend." Charges and suspicion of glaring lawlessness in the affairs of the Daman-i-Koh induced the Government to depute James Sutherland to inquire into the charges and to report on the general state of affairs prevailing there. Sutherland submitted his report in 1819, condemning in strong terms the constitution, the powers, and the actual work of the Hill Assembly. He also commented adversely on the annual stipends paid to the leaders. Many of them were no longer necessary, some of them were abused, and all of them were originally intended to be a sort of temporary bribe. In 1823 Government accepted the recommendations made in the report and appointed J. P. Ward to demarcate Daman-i-Koh. Nevertheless, Government made it quite clear that the Paharias were not to be disturbed in their possession and free enjoyment of the hills. Ward considered the treatment of the hillmen as pandering to "the preposterous claims of the Paharias." With the dwindling of the prestige of the Hill Assembly and of the standard of its work, the Paharias appeared to him in the light in which, as pointed out above, they should have appeared. He got Regulation I of 1796 repealed by Regulation I of 1827.³

At this stage, the Hos came upon the scene. We have narrated above the conditions under which the British were brought into contact with them in 1819. After the Kol Mutiny of 1831 a new policy was adopted towards the Larka Kols or Hos of Singhbhum. As the Hos hated the Hindu

² "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," p. 43.

³ Bradley-Birt: *Op. cit.*, pp. 78-122; "Dist. Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," p. 214.

Rajas, who used to receive from them as assessment a tribute of eight annas per plough, they were henceforward asked to pay the same tribute directly into the Government treasury. Within twenty years the assessment of eight annas was doubled, "without a murmur of complaint on the part of the Hos."⁴ This agreement or settlement was to lapse in 1867. For two or three years previous to its expiry, many steps were taken to prepare the Hos for the new settlement. In 1866 a large gathering was called, and the consent of the headmen was given to all that was contemplated; and in 1867 a regular assessment on the lands was introduced, and their own headmen were made the sole guardians of peace.⁵

We have briefly referred to the various armed disturbances which took place in Chota Nagpur as the consequence of great disaffection spread among the Mundas and others against the Hindu and other foreign landlords, who were slowly but surely dispossessing the aboriginals. After the great Kol Mutiny or rebellion of 1831, the Government put the entire province under the charge of an officer, designated Agent to the Governor-General. A set of rules for criminal justice was specially provided by the Governor-General, and it remained in force till the Criminal Procedure Code of 1861. The usual laws about the sales of lands for debt or arrears of rent were not to be enforced. Sale, alienation, or mortgage was not to be permitted without the sanction of the Agent. In 1854 the designation of the Province was changed, and it was put under the control of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, to be administered as a non-Regulation province.⁶ Chota Nagpur thus appears to be the first among tracts inhabited by tribalists to be clearly designated as a non-Regulation area. Roy tells us that in spite of its being a specially administered area, slowly but surely, ordinary laws and enactments in force in Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa came to be introduced in backward Chota Nagpur one by one.⁷ The Chota Nagpur Tenures Act of 1869 sought to redress some of the grievances of the peasantry. It was a partial measure—protecting tenants under a particular

⁴ Bradley-Birt: "Chota Nagpore," pp. 93, 94.

⁵ Dalton: loc. cit., pp. 184, 208.

⁶ Bradley-Birt: "Chota Nagpore," pp. 20, 21.

⁷ "Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society," 1931, p. 369.

type of tenure, leaving others untouched.⁸ Dalton, who was formerly Commissioner of Chota Nagpur and was of the opinion that the complicated machinery of civilized laws was unsuited to the backward aborigines, thought, in 1872, that the Government was "inclined to treat them with favour bordering on partiality."⁹

The outrageous and devastating Santal rebellion of 1855 is already referred to. The immediate outcome of it was that the Santal Parganas, including the Daman-i-Koh, was formed a separate district and declared a non-Regulation area by Regulation XXXVII of 1855.¹⁰ The Paharia tract also became finally a non-Regulation area under this Regulation, though since 1827 it was partially under special administration.¹¹ The Santal Paraganas District was thereby removed from the operation of the general laws and regulations. It was placed under the charge of one Deputy Commissioner and four Assistant Commissioners for the four divisions in the District. The Assistant Commissioners were given jurisdiction both in civil and criminal matters. In 1856 a few simple rules for civil and criminal administration were laid down. There was to be no intermediary between the peoples and the head of the sub-division, the Assistant Commissioner, neither pleaders nor *muktars* being permitted. All complaints were to be made verbally, and all criminal work was to be carried on with the help of the Santals themselves. There was to be no regular police, and all the police duties were vested in the villagers themselves, the headman of the village being held directly responsible.¹² The third Deputy Commissioner, Sir William Le Fleming Robinson, who held charge from 1858 to 1860, was able to do much good to the Santals, taking full advantage of the powers he had under the regulation. The system of agrestic serfdom which was so common all over India also prevailed in the Santal Parganas. Under it a man borrowed some money and gave a bond to work it out by giving labour whenever

8 S. C. Roy: "The Oraons," p. 47; K. G. Sivaswamy: "Legislative Protection and Relief of Agriculturist Debtors in India" (1939), pp. 72-3.

9 Op. cit., p. 3.

10 It is so described by Bradley-Birt and also in the Bengal Govt. Publication, "The Administration of Bengal Under Sir Andrew Fraser," p. 64, though in the "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas" it is called "Act."

11 Bradley-Birt: "The Story of an Indian Upland," p. 211.

12 "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," pp. 54, 227; Dalton: loc. cit., p. 208.

called upon to do so. He was to receive no wages but only food during the period he was working for his creditor, and occasionally a bit of cloth. The account was so managed by the creditor that usually the debtor was hardly free even at the end of his life. By custom, upheld by courts, if the debtor died without clearing his debts, his son, daughter, or other nearest relative was liable to give similar service. Thus a whole class of hereditary agrestic serfs had come into being. Sir William Robinson, in the few years of his administration, effectively stamped out the system. In 1863 a certain ruling of the Advocate-General put a check on the powers of the local officers, and the then Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Cecil Beadon, expressed his opinion that the district-administration should, as far as possible, approximate to that prevalent in the rest of Bengal. A number of landlords, availing themselves of the opportunity, went on disregarding customary rights of the Santal rayats and rack-rented them to such an extent that there were signs of unrest among them by 1871. An enquiry into their grievances was instituted, which revealed the need for defining the rights of the people in land. The then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir George Campbell, came to the conclusion that the best interests of the Santals could be served by a comprehensive general law giving the necessary powers to carry out a survey and settlement through special officers. Accordingly, he got Regulation III of 1872 enacted "for the peace and good government of the Santal Parganas." It gave the Lieutenant-Governor "full power to appoint officers to make a settlement of landed rights, to restore dispossessed headmen and others, to settle rents, and to record the customs and usages of the people." There were provisions in it of a usury-law which limited the accumulation of interest on debts. Interest on debt could not be charged at a higher rate than 24 per cent. The rayats were prohibited from transferring their rights. Further, it stated the laws that were in force in the Santal Parganas and those which might be applied or withdrawn at the discretion of Government. The survey and settlement was completed in 1879, the net result of which was to preserve the Santal Village community system.¹³ Bradley-

13 "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," pp. 58, 194, 228.

Birt thus describes the results achieved through this type of administration: "Prosperity returned to the long-suffering Santal. . . . The trust reposed in them met with immense appreciation, and cases of concealment of crimes became rare. . . . Yet this renewed prosperity has wrought little change in the Santal himself, in his thoughts and instincts and manner of life. It has raised him scarcely perceptibly in the scale of civilization. Content with things as they are, he has made no attempt to attain a higher level."¹⁴

As already stated the method of administration till 1834 was by regulations issued by the Executive Councils of Fort William, Fort St. George, and Bombay. When new territories came to be annexed, it was realized that all of them might not be suitable for being governed through the complicated Regulations. Such of these territories as were thought to be backward were classed as non-Regulation provinces and were governed under a simpler code, based on the spirit of Regulations, which were modified to suit the special circumstances of each. Thus provinces came early to be distinguished as "regulation" and "non-regulation," according as "they were originally governed under Regulations framed under the Charter Acts or under the less formal codes." Later, on this distinction largely disappeared as between province and province.¹⁵ By the Indian Councils Act of 1861 the Parliament validated rules and regulations made by the Governor-General and certain local authorities for non-Regulation provinces. Further, by the Government of India Act of 1870 the Parliament conferred upon the Governor-General in Council the power to approve and sanction as laws regulations made by Local Government for the administration of certain special areas, to which previously the Secretary of State in Council had applied the Act. Many measures were passed under the provisions of this Act. In 1874 the Indian Legislature passed the Scheduled Districts Act, Act XIV of 1874, whereby the Local Government was empowered to declare in respect of the tracts specified in the Act what enactments were or were not in force and to notify the application, with modifications or

¹⁴ Bradley-Birt: *loc. cit.*, pp. 214, 215, 219.

¹⁵ "The Imperial Gazetteer of India," Indian Empire, Vol. IV, p. 33.

restrictions if necessary, of any enactments in force at the time in any part of British India.¹⁶

The Scheduled Districts Act appears to have been designed to give effect to the Government of India Act of 1870.¹⁷ The following tracts were specified and constituted as "scheduled tracts" under it: Assam, Ajmere-Merwara, Coorg, Andaman Islands; in Bengal, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Chittagong Hill tracts, the Santal Parganas, Chota Nagpur Division and Angul Mahal; in Bombay, Aden, Sindh, Panch Mahals and estates of Mewasi Chiefs in West Khandesh; in the Central Provinces, Chanda Zamindaris, Chattisgarh Zamindaris, and Chindwara Jagiridaris; in Madras, fourteen Maliahs in Ganjam, nine Maliahs in Vizagapatam, some areas in Godavari district and Laccadives, including Minicoy; in the Punjab, Hazara, Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismailkhan, Dera Gazikhān, Lahaul, and Spiti; in the United Provinces, Jhansi Division, Kumaon and Garhwal, Tarai Parganas, four areas in Mirzapur district, family domains of the Maharaja of Benares and Jaunsar-Bawar in Dehra-Dun district; and in the Central India Agency, the pargana of Manpur.¹⁸

Of the Scheduled Districts, Assam, Ajmere-Merwara, Coorg, Andamans, all those in the Panjab, Chittagong hill tracts, the Santal Parganas, the Chota Nagpur Division, and the Mahal of Angul were so declared under the Government of India Act of 1870, and the rest only under the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874. Panch Mahals district was dropped out by Act VII of 1885. One of the maliahs of Ganjam and Jhansi division were removed from the list in 1891. The rest continued to be in the list of Scheduled Districts, though full advantage of the provisions of the Act was not taken in all cases.

As we have seen, the Santal Parganas and the Chota Nagpur Division were specially treated for some years even before the passing of this Act. One of the risings of Konds

16 A. B. Keith: "A Constitutional History of India," pp. 174, 175; N. Rajagopal Aiyangar: "The Government of India Act," 1935 (1937), p. 109.

17 "Indian Administration During the Past Thirty Years," (in the series of report on the moral and material progress of India), 1889, p. 7.

18 "Unrepealed General Acts of Governor-General in Council," Vol. II, pp. 440-455; The Pargana of Manpur was removed from the list in 1938 (Vide "Unrepealed Central Acts," Vol. II, p. 287).

in reaction to the British policy of stopping their custom of human sacrifice took place in 1846. The Raja of Angul was also involved in it, and after the suppression of the rebellion Angul was annexed in 1848. The British had already acquired Gumsur Estate in the Ganjam district in 1835. It was made subject to India Act XXIV of 1839, whereby civil and criminal jurisdiction was vested in the Agent and his Assistants. The policy of eradicating the custom of human sacrifice led the Government of India to place all the Kond Maliahs under one system through Act XXI of 1845. It seems Angul, too, when acquired, was placed under that system. Toward the end of 1861 "in consequence of the arrangements which had been made for the organization of police in the Ganjam and Vizagapatam agencies, the special agency for the hill tract of Orissa was abolished."¹⁹ All these areas were being governed under the provisions of India Act XXIV of 1839 not only till the Scheduled Districts Act was passed but even afterwards; for no notification under section 3 of this Act was issued till 1885 in the case of Ganjam and Vizagapatam, and even up to 1909, they could not be said to have come under the actual operation of the Act. In the case of Madras Agencies, viz., Ganjam, Vizagapatam, and Godavari, the original rules promulgated under India Act XXIV of 1839 were revised in 1881.²⁰ Angul, on the other hand, was declared a Scheduled District in 1877.²¹ Kondmals was joined with Angul to form the Angul District in 1894 and was a scheduled area since 1891.²²

It has been governed under the authority of the Angul District Regulation, Act I of 1894, which was twice amended, once in 1904 as Regulation IV and again in 1913 as regulation III.²³ The Mewasi estates were excluded from the ordinary laws applicable to British India by Act XI of 1846, and "special rules were framed for the administration of civil and criminal work of these estates." Though they figured in the schedule of the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874, the Act was

19 E. T. Dalton: "Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal," pp. 285-92.

20 "Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency," Vol. I, pp. 69, 74.

21 "Unrepealed General Acts," Vol. II, p. 452.

22 Ibid., p. 455.

23 "Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Committee," Orissa, p. 109.

applied to them in 1887.²⁴ Only a part of the Godavari agency was listed in the schedule of the Scheduled Districts Act, the other parts being declared a scheduled area in 1883 and 1891 by the Secretary of State for India under the powers conferred on him by the Government of India Act of 1870. Both these areas were previously parts of the plains in the Godavari district. In 1909, by a special regulation, three taluks of the Central Provinces were incorporated in the Godavari scheduled area, and thus was consolidated the Godavari agency. The Godavari agency, unlike the other two Madras agencies, was actually governed under the provisions of the Scheduled Districts Act, its section 3 having been applied to it.²⁵ In 1862 the London Missionary Society, with the object of converting the aborigines, made an offer to take a farm in Dudhi pargana, forming part of Robertsganj tahsil in South Mirzapur. But directors of the society at a later stage did not think that landlordism was compatible with the duties of missionaries and the proposal fell through. Nevertheless, it had its consequences for Dudhi, a branch of the mission being established there. Two years later Dudhi and the south of Mirzapur became a non-Regulation tract under Act XIX of 1864 described as "an Act to remove certain tracts of country in the district of Mirzapur from the jurisdiction of the local courts." Then the Scheduled Districts Act declared it a Scheduled district in 1874 without effecting material change in the then existing position, as Dudhi had been managed under Act XIX of 1864 as a government estate by the Collector. In 1891 the Board of revenue framed a new and complete set of rules for its management. The whole area—Robertsganj Tahsil south of the Kaimurs—was exempt in revenue and civil matters from the ordinary laws, except those whose operation was extended to it by special notification. In revenue matters it was placed on the same footing as other tahsils in 1904 by the application of Acts II and III of 1901, known as the Agra Tenancy Act and the United Provinces Land Revenue Act. In regard to civil justice it remained a special area, the jurisdiction of civil courts being

24 "Parliamentary Papers," *Government of India*, Vol. 19; (In it is to be found cmd. 5064: It will be referred to as "Parliamentary Papers," (Bombay Government Memorandum).

25 "Manual of the Government of India," Madras Presidency," Vol. I, pp. 63, 77; "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. VI (Madras Government Memorandum), pp. 138-39.

superseded by that of the Collector of the district, though the procedure was governed by the ordinary law, the Code of Civil Procedure (Act V of 1908). The highest court of appeal was that of the Commissioner, except in cases relating to succession and divorce, jurisdiction in relation to which was vested in the High Court of Allahabad. The whole tahsil was a separate subdivision for purposes of criminal justice, the charge of which was generally entrusted "to a full-powered officer on the district staff."²⁶

We have sketched above the nature of the policy followed by the British Government in India in regard to the Hos, the Paharias, the Santals, the Oraons, and the Mundas, all of whom rebelled at one time or another, and some of them more often than once. Their grievances regarding the tendency for their lands to pass on to non-tribesmen, and the gradual substitution of their own landlords by the landlords or money-lenders of the plains, generally manifested themselves in some violent form. In view of this, their nature being sullen and on occasions violent, the main purpose of the British policy was to secure peace and not necessarily to help the people to advance on the road to progress either by assimilation with the plains' Hindus or otherwise. The forest policy appears to have been hardly different in fundamentals from the one followed in other parts of India, governed under ordinary laws. Consistently with keeping the peace, gradually survey settlement was carried out, and by slow stages regular land-revenue was levied, wherever and whenever possible.

The Konds of Kondmals, Ganjam, and other areas were specially treated in view of the declared British policy of eradicating their custom of human sacrifice. The purpose of the proclamation of 1845, which is still looked upon as a charter of the Konds,²⁷ was issued to allay various rumours and fears raised by interested parties to rouse the Konds to frequent rebellions. Even so when Gumsur and later Chinna Kimedya came to be administered under ordinary police arrangements, partly out of dislike for fixed rules and partly from their being forced to work on making roads during cultivating seasons, the

²⁶ "District Gazetteer of Mirzapur," pp. 327, 91, 373, 374, 154.

²⁷ "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1214.

Konds rose up in arms more than once between 1866 and 1877.²⁸ Two simple sets of rules exist for the guidance of the Collector and the Revenue Commissioner in the dispensation of civil justice. In the Kondmals, only the non-aboriginal settlers, known as the hill Uriyas, have been assessed to land revenue, the Konds having to pay only a plough-tax at the rate of 12 annas per plough. Even the low cess levied on plough basis is not a land-tax as it is utilized for the development of roads and communications. In Ganjam there is not even the plough-tax. Non-aboriginal leaders, each placed in charge of a division of a taluk, have to pay fixed "Nazarana" or present to the Government. The leader in his turn is entitled to certain customary dues in cash and kind from the rayats. Most of the area still remains unsurveyed, the hundred and twenty-five villages which are surveyed and settled having been so dealt with between 1915 and 1924. In Koraput, formerly Vizagapatam agency, too, there has been no regular survey settlement. The relations between the landlord and the tenant are governed by the Madras Estates Land Act of 1908. The tenants enjoy occupancy rights under it. The existing state of affairs is described by the Orissa Committee as very archaic.²⁹ The tribes have been carrying on their shifting cultivation over a large part of these tracts. Further, they have been accorded special rights in the forests and in regard to distillation of liquor for home consumption.³⁰

Despite the special protection thus sought to be given to the tribes of these areas, as we have noticed in another connection, the Konds of the Kalahandi state, realizing how they stood to lose their lands to the Koltas, started killing and murdering them in 1882. The Konds of Ganjam district agency were discovered by Mr. Paddison in 1916 to have been losing their lands to the Uriyas. The following remarks of the Orissa committee deserve careful perusal in order that we may be able to realize the role which officers under the special powers enjoyed by them, and the special responsibilities placed on them, ought to have played long ago, and to evaluate the

²⁸ "Manual of the Ad. of the Madras Presidency," I, p. 72.

²⁹ "Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee," Orissa, pp. 10, 11, 80, 81, 13, 17.

³⁰ "Parliamentary Papers," 19 ("Madras Govt. Memorandum"), p. 1214.

utility of mere segregation of the so-called aborigines in schemes for their protection. "Still it is curious that an industrious people like them who have fertile lands with good cattle and no taxes and very few wants, should allow their lands to be taken away. The Khonds attach a religious sanction of holding the lands which belong to their family or community. One of the chief reasons for this alienation is due to indebtedness which is brought about by their desire for drink. They are obliged to borrow on occasions to secure their crops. They must sacrifice animals, which must be purchased, in case of sickness, as God requires an animal to appease His wrath. For a wedding, a feast must be given. A bride must be purchased by so many gifts in the shape of buffaloes and other animals. In a bad year food must be bought. For all these purposes they need money. Unless they have savings, they must borrow. They are thriftless, ignorant, and prone to self-indulgence and choose to get into debt and lose their lands. When they lose their lands they increase cultivation on hill slopes. In a very large number of cases alienation of lands is effected by unfair and fraudulent means by the Sowcars. They need protection from the hands of Sowcars."³¹

While these conditions must have long existed, the only well-known piece of special legislation trying to put a stop to the evil eating into the very vitals of the so-called aboriginal society of these tracts, placed under special protection by Government for seventy years, was passed in 1917. Madras Act I of 1917, known as the Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act, is intended to regulate the rate of interest that may be charged on loans advanced to members of hill tribes and to check the expropriation from their valuable lands by Uriyas and other money-lending classes in the agency Tracts of Ganjam, Vizagapatam, and Godavari.³² Under the Act no transfer of land by members of the hill tribes to others can take place without the sanction of the Agent to the Governor, who can eject an illegal transferee. It is provided that suits against the hill people must be instituted in the courts of the Agency Tracts and that their immovable property cannot be

³¹ "Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee," Orissa, pp. 91 ff.

³² "Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency," 1917-18, p. 27.

attached in execution of decrees. The rate of interest chargeable is laid down as not more than 24 per cent. Further, no compound interest can be charged and no decree can be given for an amount of interest in excess of the amount of the principal. The Madras Banking Enquiry Committee reported that little advantage was taken of these provisions.³³ It also opined that the provisions of the Act regarding the transfer of lands had proved futile, as the hill people themselves had been handing over their lands to the creditors and had not been applying for their ejection for fear of their not obtaining credit in future. In 1938 the Madras Estates Land Act Committee stated that the authorities concerned had helped to defeat the provisions by freely granting permission for mortgage and sale of lands to the people of the plains. Its remark that "the cultivators complain of their indebtedness on account of the exorbitant rate of interest" reveals that the provision for regulating the rate of interest has failed to fulfil the purpose for which it was enacted.³⁴

We have referred to the system by which a rayat has to make certain payments in cash and kind to the local heads and to the landlords. Payment in kind may and does include some compulsory yet unpaid labour. Besides such customary labour for the local headmen or the landlords, the Government and its officials are empowered to receive various kinds of compulsory labour which is theoretically to be paid for. Repairs to Government estates and buildings, mendings of roads and carrying of luggage of officials can be and have been got done under compulsory labour. When it is paid for, the rates of payment are almost always lower than the usual one. This compulsory labour is a practice of long standing and is associated in many tracts with the fact of the people holding their lands free of land-revenue. It seems that the first serious attempt made to combat the evil of compulsory labour exacted by officials was in 1924, when a circular was issued to all officers that the system should be discontinued and that labourers employed should be paid reasonable wages. But the evil continued and exists today in an almost unmitigated

³³ "The Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Report," Vol. I, p. 176.
³⁴ K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 79.

form.³⁵ Another practice rampant in some tracts is debt-bondage or bonded service, "whereby a person on receiving advance in money or kind engages himself by a written agreement to be a labourer of his creditors for agricultural and domestic purposes as long as the loan together with its interest remains unpaid." Quite often the usual consequences follow, and the contracted labourer becomes a virtual serf. Nothing seems to have been done regarding it till 1940.³⁶ With ninety years of protection given through the expedient of a Scheduled District and the policy laid down and followed or supposed to be carried out by the local officers in charge, the result appears to be not only insignificant but almost negative. The Orissa Enquiry Committee observes: "They may be said to be suffering from inferiority-complex. Drink, disease, malnutrition, and debt are at work to handicap their development. There is already a large number of landless labourers among them. The holdings are small and the food production is insufficient. Podu [shifting] cultivation considerably reduced the area of forests and the soil erosion is serious. What little they grow and earn goes into the pockets of the middlemen and money-lenders. If adequate protection is not given to them, and beneficial schemes to help them are not put into action early, the aborigines will sink still lower and become a drag on the Society."³⁷

To follow the history of the policy pursued and the results achieved in other scheduled areas, we shall begin with the Santal Parganas. It was in 1876 that Government forbade sales and transfers of land, either privately or by orders of court.³⁸ An important change in the rent-law was brought about when Regulation II of 1886 was passed. It made it impossible for rents to be enhanced for fifteen years after the settlement by a mutual agreement between a tenant and a landlord without the intermediacy of Government. That Sir William Robinson rid the country of hereditary serfdom is already mentioned. Another officer, Wood, later on abolished another system which as between Santals and non-Santals very

³⁵ "Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee," Orissa, pp. 47-51, 84-85, 48, 49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 46.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³⁸ K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 70.

often led to many abuses. Under this system a tenant used to cultivate land for a landlord on half-share basis, keeping half the produce of the land to himself, handing over the other half to the landlord. Wood substituted for it fair money rents.³⁹ In spite of all the legislation, gradually transfers of rights, mortgages, and sales began to take place. Rights might thus pass over to the very people who were sought to be kept out of the Santal village economy. Transfers might be made to money-lenders as gifts. So it was ruled that a mere deed of gift did not confer rights in the land. Finally Regulation III of 1872 was amended by Regulation III of 1908 prohibiting any kind of transfer of a rayat's holding and providing for the ejection of the transferee. The Bihar Banking Enquiry Committee of 1930 found the working of these laws quite effective, as the civil, revenue, and criminal powers were concentrated in the hands of the Deputy Commissioner and his subordinate officers.⁴⁰ In 1910 the Santals were declared to be well-off. The village community system fostered a spirit of co-operation which was reflected in a great improvement and extension of cultivation.⁴¹ The Santals and other aboriginal castes and tribes in the districts of Birhum, Bankura, and Midnapur were protected by the extension of a special legislation already in operation in Bengal. The Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act of 1918 added a chapter to the original Bengal Tenancy Act VIII of 1885 and was based on Regulation III of 1872 and other later Tenancy legislation for aboriginals in other provinces. Its essence was that it prevented the rights of those castes and tribes passing on to the non-aboriginals.⁴²

We have already referred to the change brought about in the manner of celebrating their great festival of Sohrae, curtailing the period of unfettered drinking. Except for prosperity and the minor changes noted here, the Santal, as Bradley-Birt tells us, remained at his old stage of civilization, making no effort to raise his level.

The Paharias of the Rajmahal Hills, as we have seen, were living a precarious existence. Cleveland, their great

39 "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," pp. 187-88, 190.

40 K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., pp. 71, 72.

41 "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," pp. 195, 194.

42 K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., pp. 76, 78; "The Administration of Bengal Under Sir Andrew Fraser," p. 55.

benefactor, wanted them to come down from their heights to the foot of the hills in the Daman-i-Koh. His premature death removed the one man who could have possibly succeeded in that enterprise. The Hinduized section of the Paharias, known as the Mal Paharias, seem to have been much more settled than their brethren for a long time. Some of the Paharias were already included in the Santal settlement of 1867. And it was reported by local officers that among the Mal Paharias plough-cultivation had progressed so far as to render shifting cultivation insignificant for their wants. Hence it was decided to prohibit shifting cultivation in the tracts of the Mal Paharias; and the policy was gradually but effectively carried out. The result was that at the Santal settlement of 1879, altogether 305 Paharia villages came to be included in it. In 1881, the then Deputy Commissioner discovered that the Paharias were formerly subject to a zamindari regime, and in 1882 he drew up a scheme for a survey and settlement of the Paharias and for a commutation of the stipends paid to their leaders. The Government thought it was incumbent upon it to consult the Paharias themselves about a survey-settlement. The Paharias having declined the offer, Government dropped the scheme. In 1895 some Paharia headmen from both the Hinduized and non-Hinduized sections applied for settlement stipulating that lands for their shifting cultivation without restriction should be set aside. Perhaps this change of mind on the part of the Paharias had some connection with the forest policy which was being put into operation very vigorously since 1894, though it was inaugurated by Sir Richard Temple in 1876. Whatever the reason for the request of the Paharias, it was there and was granted. The settlement reserved nearly 40 per cent of the surveyed land for shifting cultivation. People inhabiting the north part of the Rajmahal Hills, the non-Hinduized Sauria Paharia, were entirely left to practise their shifting cultivation, there being no forest there worth reserving. The position of the Paharias as described in 1910 was that the settled ones were permanent tenants of Government, who paid light rent, but could not dispose of their lands to others or settle tenants on them. Those who were not settled paid no rent. The Paharia chiefs

not only paid no rent, but were in receipt of their old stipends, in return for which they reported births, deaths, and crimes, and attended the Magistrate's court. Their economic condition was reported to be bad and was largely the result of their drinking habit and idleness.⁴³ As we have seen above, Bradley-Birt described them in 1905 as poor and unwilling to exert themselves to better their lot or to change their manner of life.

The Chota Nagpur Encumbered Estates Act of 1876 sought to protect the local zamindars who were "far inferior to their neighbours outside the province in general intelligence and business capacity" against being bought off by the latter. Though the Act protected the zamindar, indirectly it also served the purpose of securing the aboriginal tenants' welfare by preventing an outsider stepping in as a zamindar and disregarding the tenants' customary rights.⁴⁴ Notifications against forced sales were issued in 1878, and the Chota Nagpur Landlord and Tenant Procedure Act of 1879 laid down fundamentals of rent-law for Chota Nagpur in suppression of Act X of 1859, which was till then the Rent-Law for the whole of Upper India. The law failed to go to the root of the troubles of the aboriginal rayats, who were specially complaining of the hardships they were subjected to under the system of customary but forced services and dues. Both the unpaid labour as well as the cesses in money and kind were vexatious, being of an irregular and uncertain nature. Finally Act II of 1897, the Chota Nagpur Commutation Act, was passed, which is "confined to the record of predial services, i.e. services of ploughing, digging, sowing and reaping for the landlord and carrying his burdens on journeys, and to their commutation into cash payments."⁴⁵ Still the troubles of the people were not over; and as elsewhere stated there were armed disturbances. Fresh inquiries led to the passing of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy (Amendment) Act of 1903 which applied to the Chota Nagpur division excepting Manbhum. In this Act, the tenures left out in the original Act of 1869 were protected. The aboriginals were tried to be prevented from being reduced

43 "Dist. Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," pp. 214-16, 217, 218, 167, 179, 196.

44 K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 111. "Chota Nagpore," pp. 293-94.

45 "The Administration of Bengal," by Andrew Fraser, p. 59.

to the position of serfs. Mortgages of land beyond five years were made illegal. The period of usufructuary mortgages was limited to seven years. The survey-settlement, that was proceeding, had made it clear that the laws passed and enforced till then had failed to protect effectively the aboriginal tenantry. To remedy the evil, the principal enactments relating to landlord and tenant in Chota Nagpur with some additions were consolidated into an Act known as the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908.⁴⁶ In 1906 a more positive step toward making some of the tribes free from debt was tried. About one and a half lakhs of rupees were distributed among the Mundas at 6½ per cent interest by government as loans for repayment of mortgage debts.⁴⁷

Though the Bhils as a tribe were not comprehended in scheduled districts, the Mewasi estates in Khandesh were a Scheduled District. And in the early history of the pacification of the Bhils, who had taken to the life of plundering and marauding, there figured the Bhil Agency. Steps more or less similar to those in the case of Paharias were taken. The Bhils were tried to be settled on lands and were also given stipends.⁴⁸ Once they were fairly settled, the Agency was abolished and they were treated almost like the rest of the population. The only area marked out for special treatment was the Mewasi estates, having had its simple laws since 1846 and having been declared a Scheduled District in 1887. Since 1901, in the districts of Khandesh, Thana, and Kanara certain lands were specially reserved for being granted under restricted tenure only to the members of the aboriginal tribes.⁴⁹ By 1928 about a million acres of land were so granted.⁵⁰ The intention underlying this policy was not achieved at least in the Bhil tracts, and since 1929 land thus granted has been made not only inalienable but also impartible.⁵¹ Nothing of importance was specially done to the Mewasi estates. Even the special criminal laws, which had existed since 1846, were

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 60-63; Sivaswamy, *loc. cit.*, p. 73.

47 K. G. Sivaswamy, *loc. cit.*, p. 226.

48 Capt. D. C. Graham: "Brief Historical Sketch of the Bhil Tribes," pp. 6-14.

49 Sivaswamy, *loc. cit.*, p. 74.

50 "Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India," p. 421.

51 "Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in the Province of Bombay," pp. 7, 4.

abolished in 1920, and the area was brought under ordinary criminal and police jurisdiction. Only the special civil rules continued to be in force. In 1918, Government promised that the surplus from the excise revenue of the estates would be utilized for their benefit, but the promise remained unfulfilled.⁵²

The Gonds, the Korkus, and the Baigas were not specially protected except in three Zamindari areas. In Bilaspur Zamindaris some effort seems to have been made to understand and solve the problem of the so-called aborigines through the application of certain laws common to the province as a whole. Mr. C. U. Wills opines that for the first fifty years of British rule the area was entirely neglected. The simple primitive people had been encouraged in their unsuspecting simplicity and their archaic system of shifting cultivation by the abundance of land and the absence of competition. But since about 1890 local conditions were literally revolutionized. Yet at the time of his writing in 1912 the tract was governed by the ordinary law. The police and the excise were in the hands of the district authorities. The changed conditions had introduced a large number of traders, contractors, and money-lenders. Mr. Wills points out the importance of continuing the system of tribal village-headmen and the need to protect it against the tendency of the zamindars to introduce non-aboriginal ones. He tells us that under section 65 A of the Land Revenue Act of 1881⁵³ the protection granted to headmen is of a permanent and fixed character and suggests that such protection must be made conditional on good management. Perhaps for this reason, he is dissatisfied with such a method of safeguarding the interests of tribal people. Protection to tribal headmen was given in 1890 by a measure which applied to the province as a whole. Act XVI of 1889 was designed to extend the operation of certain laws prevailing in the Province in order to protect both the tenantry and the village headmen. In the first place, the provision of the Central Provinces Tenancy Act were extended to the zamindaris. They gave every tenant a statutory title in his holding with all its

⁵² "Parliamentary Papers," 19. no. 1238-39 (Bombay Govt. Memorandum).

⁵³ "Madras Code," Vol. I (1936), p. 114.

consequences. In the second place, section 65 A of the Land Revenue code was applied so as to give protected status to deserving village headmen. But Wills was not satisfied even with that method of giving protection because it did not cover the rather special problems of the aborigines. He refers with approval to the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 and its reported effects. And he wants a similar measure to give effective protection to the people of the tract he is dealing with, so that the aboriginal may have "breathing space, a fair opportunity of adapting himself to the new conditions." Yet he thinks that on the whole the duty of giving reasonable protection was fairly discharged. That his idea of giving protection was by way of having some special legislation similar to the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act is clear from his approving reference to it and its operation, as well as from his mention, in support of his contention, of Mr. Bell's proposal in regard to Mandla made a year or two earlier. With all his sympathy for aborigines it is manifest that he was not in favour of allowing uncontrolled or even controlled practice of shifting cultivation. He mentions its practice by the Bhumias, the Binjh-wars, the Mahatos, the Korwas, and others, and tells us that by its practice they only eke out a precarious existence in the hills. Plough-cultivation, carried on by others, was probably introduced by Gond and Kavar immigrants.⁵⁴

Though all the tracts in which large numbers of the so-called aboriginal people resided were not comprised within the Scheduled Districts, it does not mean that officials, even of the highest grade, were unaware of the general and specific problems of cultivators and the so-called aborigines. As early as 1863, Sir Richard Temple clearly defined Government's policy towards the hill tribes. They were conceived as an essential part of the natural economy of hills and forests. Their system of shifting cultivation was to be put down, but in such a manner as not to cause great distress to them lest they should take to plundering and cattle-lifting.⁵⁵ Forsyth, writing in 1872, clearly distinguished between the problems of the hills and the Hinduized sections of the Gonds and

⁵⁴ "Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Zamindari Estates of the Bilaspur District" (1912), pp. 5, 6, 11-13, 29, 32.

⁵⁵ Hislop: "Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces," pp. V, VI.

others, and suggested appropriately distinct remedies. As to the hills-section he was quite sure that "civilization" was "impossible" and "undesirable." All that was needed was to "eliminate by thoughtful administration causes which led to their depression or demoralization and to avoid any treatment irksome to their wild and timid nature which is not necessitated by the general requirements of the country." Yet such of their land as was capable of being brought under permanent cultivation was to be so treated with their help. And efforts were to be made to secure the fruits of the wild man's labour to him through adequate legislation administered with the fullest comprehension of the difficulties. He particularly stressed the need of not only proper laws, but also their administration, with real appreciation of the handicaps which these people were working under *vis-a-vis* the land-grabbers of the plains.⁵⁶

Forsyth's estimation, so remarkable for its clear grasp, deserves our careful perusal, especially because it has gone unheeded so long. He observes: "Legislation has never yet enabled an inferior to stand before a superior race; but it has frequently done much to put a weapon in the hands of the aggressors without which the invaded might have held their own. There are flaws in our law relating to the occupation of land, and to the legal enforcement of obligations; which, it may be feared, arm the Hindu irresistibly against the aborigine. None but a capitalist can now practically occupy the waste lands so as to secure a legal proprietary title; and the aborigine never has such capital as would enable him to do so. . . . Again, our administration of civil justice, while perhaps sufficiently suited to the requirements of settled districts, is practically a negation of all justice to the aborigine in his jungle. The courts sit at distant stations; and in the Central Provinces there is even a rule *prohibiting* the trial of cases by civil officers on tour, unless *both* parties live on the spot. It wants only the slightest acquaintance with the timid and suspicious aborigine to see that this really amounts to denying him a hearing altogether. He will never come in to the station if he can avoid it by any payment within his means to make,

⁵⁶ Op. cit., pp. 162-63.

and, if he does, the chances are against his succeeding in escaping from it, and the crowd of harpies who clog the wheels of justice, without leaving behind him much of his worldly substance. The apparent necessities of a government which impoverishes its treasuries to cover the land with public works have led to an economy in its judicial establishments that inevitably leads to a very superficial investigation of small causes, and to a corrupt execution of the processes of the courts. . . . In fine, our system is too sharp and swift for these people. The dwellers in the plains may be left to adjust themselves to its requirements: they are clever enough to protect themselves. But it is death to the honest, timid, and unsettled aboriginal."⁵⁷

The remedies he suggested rival in their simplicity the clarity of his analysis of the problem. He says: "The proper remedy obviously is to encourage, or even prescribe, the hearing of claims against the hill people by the superior civil officers during tours in their own country—tours which for many reasons should be regularly made, instead of, as now, being rendered almost impracticable owing to constant pressure of other work." Pointing out how the hill aboriginal's ignorance leads him to sign a bond and his truthfulness to his admission of such signature in a court of law, he suggests a remedy to put a stop to fraudulent transactions. He says: "In addition to an improved machinery for the disposal of such cases, we should accordingly require some system of compulsory registration of agreements between such parties without which no claim should be enforced."⁵⁸

About the future of the Hinduized Gonds, whether farmers, tenants, or farm-labourers, he was convinced, as he observed elsewhere, that it lay in their approximation to the Hindu cultivator through constant association and ultimate assimilation with the Hindus of the plains. Their wretched condition he thought was mainly due to their inordinate desire for drink. He was satisfied that the change in the excise policy—from the "outstill" to the "central distillery"—was changing their condition for the better, and hoped that they would maintain the progress thus started. Though he was:

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 163-165.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-65.

fully aware of the nature of the economic partnership between the Gond cultivator or tenant and the Hindu or the Gond landlord and of the rate of interest charged, he saw not only nothing wrong in the transaction, but even thought that it was on the whole beneficial to the Gond cultivator. He was of the opinion that one of the provisions of the then existing law whereby the farm-stock of a cultivator could not be attached for a decree for debts circumscribed severely his power to raise necessary loans to exploit the land and to profit by cultivation. He observes: "The short-sighted policy long followed by our legislature, which rendered the recovery of such debts a matter of the greatest difficulty and uncertainty, greatly aided in maintaining these rates of interest. This policy is not even yet extinct, there being, in the Central Provinces at least, a rule which prohibits procedure against the farm-stock of a debtor, although it may all have been purchased with the borrowed money to recover which execution is sought."⁵⁹

Captain Ward, during his operations of the survey-settlement of 1868 in the Mandla district, reserved waste land in order to check the very desultory habits of cultivation of the Gonds and thus to render ordinary cultivation more effective.⁶⁰

J. B. Fuller, reporting in 1892, informs us that out of a total of 125 Zamindari estates of the Gonds, 82 were rendered inalienable under an entail only, it would appear, through the expedient of introducing that condition in the deeds of grant. Though he was not sure if the civil courts would have recognized the condition as valid, yet he found that it had worked well. He observes: "Were it not indeed for the fact that two-thirds of the estates are held under a species of entail which bars alienation, many of them would before now have passed into the hands of money-lenders." As regards the ordinary cultivators, he thought that their condition required more serious attention of Government. Much land was passing from their possession into that of the money-lenders; and the right of transfer of land conferred on the cultivators by the British law was in no small measure re-

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-157.

⁶⁰ "District Gazetteer of Mandla," p. 199.

sponsible for it. The right for being properly utilized required an amount of intelligence in the cultivator, and the improvement of intelligence was merely left to time and chance. The evil created by the right of transfer was intensified by the provisions of the Contract Act, under which the Civil Courts enforced contracts, however one-sided or usurious their terms may be. He informs us that the alteration of the law was under consideration by the Local Government. The more specific problem of the aboriginal cultivator was the fact of his inordinate drinking. He says: "There is not a report dealing with the condition of the Gonds which does not lay stress on the ruin which drink is bringing them, and it is to be apprehended that the Excise policy of Government has not tended to counteract this tendency. It has never been recognized that the circumstances of these tribes are peculiar and call for exceptional treatment."⁶¹

The problems of cultivators in general and of these so-called aboriginal cultivators in particular were thus brought to the notice of the authorities from time to time. As is clear from Fuller's observations, the only special action that was being considered was a measure to right the wrongs which were being perpetrated through the instrumentality of the Contract Act. Yet it was not till 1898 that something was actually done to remedy the evils from which the tenants were suffering, though some protection was given to landlords in 1891. The Central Provinces Tenancy Act of 1898 was designed to give the badly needed redress to landholders and tenants alike, without, it would appear, any distinction between the aboriginal and the non-aboriginal.⁶² This Act was intended to amend the Tenancy Act of 1883 in order to further protect the tenants. It also sought to protect a landholder against money-lenders selling him out. Prevention of the transfer of a landholder's home-farm was already aimed at in an Act of 1891. But it had failed to achieve the purpose. In the Tenancy Act of 1898, therefore, further provision for achieving the object was made.⁶³

61 "Review of the Progress of the Central Provinces," pp. 29, 33, 48, 29.

62 K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 93.

63. "Abstract of the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor-General of India for 1897," pp. 335, 337-339; "Madras Code," Vol. I (1936), p. 221 ff.

The C. P. Tenancy Act of 1898, whatever it might or might not have achieved for the ordinary cultivators, does not seem to have solved the problem of the so-called aborigines; for in the report on the land-revenue settlement of the Mandla district carried out during 1904-1910, Mr. Bell dwelt on the phenomenon of the aborigines' lands passing into the hands of non-aborigines, and insisted on what he called a "violent remedy" to protect the malguzars or village proprietors. The only method, according to him, "of saving from complete expropriation a lovable and by no means undeserving proprietary body" was "some form of legislation rendering alienation in any form by an aboriginal void, except under the personal supervision and sanction of a Protector of Aborigines, who would naturally be the Deputy Commissioner." About the Gond tenantry he thought that though their simplicity was facilitating Hindu aggression they were "commencing to hold their own even in the most advanced Hindu groups." The Gond tenantry, despite appearances to the contrary, was "distinctly comfortably off." In the well-occupied tracts the Gonds had settled down to permanent residence and plough-cultivation and they differed "little from the slacker class of Hindu cultivators."⁶⁴ The C. P. Tenancy Act thus helped perhaps the Gond and other tenants fairly well, but did not materially affect the position of the malguzars. We have seen above that under the C. P. Land Revenue Code it was possible to do something for them; and Mr. Wills testified to it. Why nothing was attempted in the rest of the Central Provinces, as in the Bilaspur zamandaris, we do not know.

In the western area of the so-called aborigines, the Berar Land Revenue Code could afford some special treatment under section 66. And at least in Melghat of the Amraoti district it was so applied. The aboriginal tribes enjoyed the right of prior claim to vacant land under restricted tenure.⁶⁵

It is quite clear from the suggestions of Messrs. Bell and Wills, who evidently felt very strongly in favour of the so-called aborigines, that the best and the utmost protection they

⁶⁴ "Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Mandla District" (1911), pp. 40, 44, 46.

⁶⁵ "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1419 (C. P. Govt. Memorandum).

sought for the aboriginal malguzars or village proprietors and the zamindars was some kind of law, making alienation of aboriginals' land impossible without the transaction being thoroughly scrutinized by some highly placed district authority. Though the zamindars were tried to be safeguarded under ordinary law, and the village proprietors could have been protected under the Revenue Code, it seems the validity of the former procedure was not tested and the latter method does not seem to have been utilized. Having failed to utilize the provisions of the ordinary law for whatever they were worth, the C. P. Government passed the Land Alienation Act in 1916. It applies only to aboriginal proprietors and is extended year after year to apply to a number of backward areas. The Act has done a great deal for the aboriginals.⁶⁶

Under Section 71 of Government of India Act of 1915, the Secretary of State for India in Council may apply that section to any part of British India and thus empower the Government of India to make Regulations to carry on the administration of the area to which the section is applied. In practice the power to govern by Regulation, however, is only given in respect of backward areas. The position as regards legislative authority on the eve of the political reforms of 1919, was that while to some areas both the Scheduled Districts Act and Section 71 of the 1915 Act applied, to others only one or the other of them applied.⁶⁷

The reforms suggested by Montague and Lord Chelmsford in their report did not omit the consideration of the so-called aborigines. The authors of the report made it clear that there were certain backward areas in the provinces where, the people being primitive, there was "no material on which to found political institutions." They thought such areas could be fairly easily demarcated. In their opinion, they would be the tracts included in the schedules and appendices of the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874 with certain exceptions and "possibly certain additions." Though they did not want to specify them nor to lay down the precise arrangement for their administration, they thought that the "typically backward

66 K. G. Sivaswamy, *loc. cit.*, pp. 75, 76.

67 "Ninth Despatch on Indian Constitutional Reforms," Appendix V, pp. 1-3.

tracts" would be directly administered by the head of the province. All specification was to be left to the Government of India.⁶⁸ The suggestion made in the report that the backward tracts should be directly administered by the head of the province was not carried out.⁶⁹

The Government of India Act of 1919 under Section 52-A (2) empowered the Governor-General in Council to declare any territory to be a backward tract and with the sanction of the Secretary of State to direct that the Government of India Act shall apply to the territory with such exceptions and modifications as may be prescribed in his notification. Thereafter he may direct that any Act of the Indian Legislature shall not apply to the territory or shall apply with such exceptions and modifications as he may prescribe. Further he may authorize the Governor in Council to issue similar directions in respect of the Acts of the Provincial Legislature. The power of issuing regulations by executive order in regard to those territories still remained.⁷⁰ The Government of India, in their proposals under Section 52-A (2) forwarded to the Secretary of State, divided the backward areas into two classes: (i) "Those wholly excluded," and (ii) "Those in which the scheme should be introduced with modifications." In classifying the areas specifically under one or the other category they were "guided partly by the existing legal position in respect of the several areas, and partly by the recommendations of the local Governments." It is significant that Sir C. Shankaran Nair, the only Indian member of the Viceroy's Council at the time, while agreeing with the proposals about the wholly excluded tracts, was emphatically opposed to the creation of the other category.⁷¹ Finally, the following areas were declared Backward Tracts: (1) Laccadive Islands and Minicoy; (2) Chittagong Hill Tracts; (3) Spiti; (4) Angul District; (5) Darjeeling District; (6) Lahaul; (7) Ganjam Agency; (8) Vizagapatam Agency; (9) Godavari Agency; (10) Chota Nagpur Division; (11) Sambalpur District; (12)

68 "Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms," p. 129.

69 "Indian Statutory Commission Report," Vol. I, p. 159.

70 N. Rajagopala Aiyangar: "The Govt. of India Act," 1935, p. 110; A. B. Keith: "A Constitutional History of India," p. 265.

71 "Ninth Despatch on Indian Constitutional Reforms," pp. 7-11.

Santal Parganas District; (13) Garo Hills District; (14) British portion of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, excluding Shillong Municipality and Cantonment; (15) Mikir Hills; (16) North Cachar Hills; (17) Naga Hills; (18) Lushai Hills; and (19) Sadiya, Balipara, and Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts.⁷² In the list of Scheduled Districts there were included a number of tracts which were so listed because of either their recent incorporation in the Indian Empire or their peculiar conditions, though they did not contain what later on came to be called the aboriginal tribes. Leaving out of consideration such tracts and others which were removed from the list of the Scheduled Districts before the passing of the Government of India Act of 1919, it is seen that at least six areas, which were classed as Scheduled Districts because their population was aboriginal and backward, viz., Mewasi estates in Bombay, the three zamindaris and jagiri areas in the Central Provinces, and Mirzapur and Jaunsar-Bawar in the United Provinces, do not figure in the list of the Backward Tracts. On the other hand, the whole of the Sambalpur District, in which only three zamindaris forming about one third of the whole district were ever a Scheduled District, is added.⁷³

The exclusion of some of the areas already included in the list of Scheduled Districts from the new category of Backward Tracts did not necessarily mean that they were brought under normal administration, much less that the reforms of 1919 were applied to them. The Scheduled Districts of the Central Provinces, though not figuring in the list of Backward Tracts, were excluded from the franchise under Section 52-A (2).⁷⁴ The area covered by them formed one quarter of the Central Provinces without the Feudatory States and Berar.⁷⁵

Considered from the point of view of representation of the people in the Legislature of their Province, the Backward Tracts fall into three divisions. Those of the first division are

72 "The Govt. of India Act with Rules and Notifications Thereunder" (Central Govt. Publications, 1924), pp. 254-55.

73 "Report of the Indian Constitutional Reforms," Appendix V, p. 2.

74 "The Indian Papers," 19, pp. 1353-4.

75 "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. I, p. 73.

not at all represented. They are: (1) Laccadive Islands, etc., (2) Chittagong Hill tracts, (3) Spiti, and (4) Angul. Those of the second division have representation only through nomination. They are: (5) Darjeeling, (6) Lahaul, and Nos. 13-19, all the Assam tracts. Areas of the third division, viz., the Madras Agency tracts, Nos. 7-9, and Bihar and Orissa areas, Nos. 10-12, are included in the constituencies returning members to the Provincial Legislatures, and also they have nominated members to represent the so-called aboriginals' interests.

Taking the legislative authority of the Provincial and Indian Legislatures as the basis of classification, one can divide the Backward Tracts into two groups. With respect to tracts in the first group formed by Nos. 1 to 4 above, the Legislatures cannot enact any law applying to them. The Governor-General in Council or the Governor in Council, as the case may be, alone can apply any of the general enactments to them with necessary modifications. All the remaining Backward Tracts fall in the second group in respect of which the Legislatures may pass laws, but with the provision therein that they shall come into operation on such date and with such modifications and exceptions as the Governor-General in Council or the Governor in Council may direct. As we shall presently see, tracts numbered 10-19 in the above list, were to be under the Provincial Government and not the Governor in Council; the Transferred Subjects were to be administered by the ministers. We should expect, therefore, that in their case the application of laws should be entrusted to the Provincial Government with full authority of the Ministers in their subjects. But the notification is quite clear on the point and entrusts the responsibility to the Governor in Council. In actual practice it worked quite differently. In the case of the Bihar and Orissa tracts, the ministers dealt with "transferred subjects substantially in the same way as they" did "in the rest of the Province."⁷⁶ In Assam, on the other hand, under the power conferred upon the Governor in the Instrument of Instructions, rules were framed which confined "the powers of Ministers in

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 108.

dealing with the backward tracts within very narrow limits."⁷⁷ With such differences in practice it is clear that the real distinction, if any, must be based upon the details laid down in the notification.

Thus only two classes or divisions need be recognized from the point of view of the authority of the Legislatures. But it is also clear that the dividing line in reality is very fine. In both cases whether a law is or is not to be applied, and if to be applied with what modifications, is decided by the Governor-General in Council or the Governor in Council. The Legislatures by themselves are powerless to enact any law which will directly apply to any of the Backward Tracts. The Indian Statutory Commission rightly observed: "Thus there exists a complete statutory bar to the legislative authority of the legislatures within every backward tract."⁷⁸

In the Backward Tracts, numbered 1-9, the administration is vested in the Governor in Council. The Assam tracts, 13-19, are, by notification, under the authority of the Provincial Government, but under the Instrument of Instructions they were more or less removed to the first category. Tracts, numbered 10-12, have dyarchy with full authority of the Ministers in the Transferred Subjects.

In the case of the first six of the Backward Tracts, the expenditure is non-votable, and neither can discussion of any matter take place nor can questions be asked in the Legislature without the sanction of the Governor of the Province.

Further, the Scheduled Districts, the Melghat taluk in the Amraoti District, and the Mandla District till 1926 in the Central Provinces, were excluded from the franchise.⁷⁹

The notification declaring the Backward Tracts was subject to a revision by the Government of India after two years in the case of the Madras Agency Tracts. In the meanwhile, a rising was "engineered" by an "agitator," and the Madras Government reported at the end of 1922 that there was no improvement among the people and suggested the continuance of their exclusion from the reforms. The Govern-

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 160.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 159.

⁷⁹ "Parliamentary Papers," 19, pp. 1353-4.

ment of India acted accordingly and the tracts continued to be among the Backward Tracts.

The Indian Statutory Commission has attempted to group the Backward Tracts into two large categories, perhaps following the procedure adopted by the Government of India. The first four of the Backward Tracts are rightly classified as Wholly Excluded Areas. The other category is designated Modified Exclusion. Further, it describes the varying degrees of Modified Exclusion. We have grouped the tracts on different principles. We see that hardly any two classifications agree. The varying degrees of exclusion are of real importance. To class Chota Nagpur, the Santal Parganas, and Sambalpur either with Darjeeling and Lahaul or with the Madras Agency tracts, or again with the Assam tracts, is to ignore very significant differences. As the Commissioners themselves have stated, in Chota Nagpur, the Santal Parganas, and Sambalpur, in the administration of the Transferred Subjects the Ministers worked almost in the same way as in the case of the rest of the province. The same cannot possibly be said of any other Backward Tract.

CHAPTER V

So-called Aborigines and British Parliament

BETWEEN the Indian Constitutional Reforms of 1919 and their next instalment of 1935, hardly any measure calculated to protect the interests of the so-called aborigines seems to have been taken. Needless to say, the more positive task of educating them for better agriculture and fuller life appears scarcely to have been thought of.

We have seen that in the case of Konds, the legislation of 1917 was reported upon in 1938 as not having been utilized properly by the officials concerned. In the Santal Paraganas the operation of Regulation III of 1908 was favourably reported upon by the Bihar Banking Enquiry Committee of 1930.¹ In Chota Nagpur an amendment in the Tenancy Act was made in 1924 with a view to lessening the rigidity of some of its provisions by empowering the Local Government to make rules permitting certain transfers of land among the tribes.² As late as in 1935 the Bihar and Orissa Government refers only to the special tenancy laws prevailing in Chota Nagpur, the Santal Parganas, Sambalpur, and Angul as "the bulwark of the backward peoples," and speaks of future amendments of the Tenancy Acts to afford "needed protection for their tenancy rights."³ Similarly the Madras tracts, though they were administered by the Governor in Council, continued to run in their old tenor, as is clear from the Memorandum submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission by the Madras Government, which fails to record any special measure and refers only to a rising "engineered by an agitator."⁴ Moreover, there is evidence to show that the protection given to the tracts through the device of a Backward Tract was not taken seriously for some time. A Government Order, dated the 20th

¹ K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., pp. 71, 72.

² Ibid., p. 73.

³ "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1309.

⁴ "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. VI, pp. 138-142.

January, 1928, enjoined that "an order issued under the authority of the Governor acting with his ministers shall not apply to the agency [Ganjam agency] or any portion of it unless and until an order to the effect" was passed by the Governor in Council in the Revenue Department.⁵ From this order one concludes that such orders of the Governor, acting with his ministers, were operative till 1928, though the Governor-General in Council had already notified the area as a Backward Tract to be administered by the Governor in Council and not by the Provincial Government. In the Central Provinces the Land Alienation Act, a measure of general application passed in 1916, was extended to the Scheduled Districts. The Act applied only to the proprietors and not tenants. Yet nothing was done to have the benefits of the Act extended to tenants till 1937, in which year the Revenue Administration report of Berar recommended its extension to aboriginal tenants, believed to be losing ground in many places.⁶ Regarding the Scheduled District of Mirzapur in the United Provinces, the only information vouchsafed in 1935 is that it was a Scheduled District and was "subject of notifications issued under that Act."⁷

It is not unreasonable to conclude that no further attempt to solve the problem of the protected people was made. The Mewasi estates in the Bombay Presidency reveal a similar state of affairs. Though the special criminal laws of the tract were abolished in 1920, the special civil rules continued to be in force. And in 1935 the Government of Bombay proposed that the estates should be listed as a Partially Excluded Area, as it was then considering a measure for providing that the estates shall be inalienable, and it was not sure that the Provincial Legislature would agree to such legislation.⁸ Thus nothing special was being attempted in the protected areas of the so-called aborigines.

Let us see what the state of affairs was in the aboriginal areas not so safeguarded. We have seen that the Bengal Tenancy Act was amended in 1918 with a view to meeting

5 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1214.

6 K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 76.

7 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1300.

8 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, pp. 1237-1239.

the special circumstances of the Santals and other aboriginal castes and tribes, not included in the Scheduled Districts. The amended provisions were first applied to the Santals of the districts of Birbhum, Bankura, and Midnapur. By a fresh amendment they were extended to the Sunderbans.⁹ In the Central Provinces the Land Alienation Act of 1916 was applied to a number of areas which were neither strictly a Scheduled District nor properly a Backward Tract. Mr. C. J. W. Lillie found, during his settlement operations of 1927-30, that the Act had certainly served its purpose in the Mandla district, where, since 1916, the "process by which ultimately the whole village passes to non-residents has been materially checked." Thus proprietors or malguzars were more or less effectively protected by this legislation, without the additional safeguarding features of a Scheduled District.

Mr. Lillie further described the circumstances of the resident malguzars as comfortable, and though the Gonds were still somewhat improvident, they, too, were "prosperous and contented, and well able to weather a normal course of seasons." As we know, the Act was not designed to give special protection to tenants. Yet Mr. Lillie's account of them leaves little doubt that they were fairly well off and made a much better show in their external appurtenances than at the previous settlement by Mr. Bell. Their greatest defect was a heavy drink-bill. As regards the replacement of aboriginal tenantry by non-aboriginals, complained of in other areas, his observations do not support the contention with respect to Mandla. He says: "The tenantry is predominantly aboriginal. . . . Non-agriculturists have yet to establish a substantial footing, and the expropriation of the cultivating castes is not a serious menace."¹⁰ The Korkus of Melghat in the Amraoti district, a non-protected tract, equally profited by the provisions of the Act.¹¹ It is noteworthy that while in the Central Provinces between the years 1933 and 1937 at least seven measures, intended to give relief to poor debtors, whether through control of money-lending, or the rate of interest or

⁹ K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 77.

¹⁰ "Report on the Revision of Land Revenue Settlement of the Mandla District" pp. 4, 5.

¹¹ K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 76.

through debt-conciliation, were enacted and put into operation, there was not a single one of its kind passed in Bihar, a province with a large protected area.¹² The Government of Bombay, with only a small area as a Scheduled District, showed much concern for the welfare of the so-called aborigines. In 1930 it appointed a Committee to report on the measures to be adopted to help the Depressed Classes and the Aboriginal Tribes. The Committee made eminently practical suggestions regarding the grant of land, forced labour, and the spread of education with a suitably modified curriculum.¹³

To summarize the results of protection through the device of a Scheduled District or a Backward Tract, as regards the possession of land by the so-called aborigines, it is seen that the situation in the Santal Parganas and in Singhbhum has been more or less successfully handled. In the districts of Manbhum, Hazaribagh, and Palamau of the Chota Nagpur Division, on the other hand, exploitation has gone to such an extent that the aborigines have been reduced, in many parts, to the position of landless labourers or of agrestic serfs.¹⁴ The special legislation came in rather too late for reclamation of all that the aborigines of Chota Nagpur had lost.¹⁵ The delay in remedying the evil was so long that when the special legislation, restricting alienation of land, actually came into operation, the people having been long accustomed to transfers felt the restrictions as rather irksome. They even thought that they were not needed and used subterfuges to evade them.¹⁶ In the Kond tracts, particularly those which were till recently under Madras administration, not only was legislation enacted after similar legislation was passed in other Provinces, but it also failed to achieve its end, largely owing to administrative apathy and laxity.

In the Central Provinces, on the other hand, fairly effective protection was given in the few Scheduled Districts with the help of the ordinary legislation in existence. In the non-scheduled areas the so-called aborigines were, to judge by

12 Ibid., pp. 386-387.

13 "Report," pp. 22, 41, 42, 47.

14 "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. XII (Bihar and Orissa Government Memorandum), pp. 341, 358.

15 S. C. Roy: "The Oraons of Chota Nagpur," p. 207.

16 S. C. Roy in "J. B. O. R. S.," 1931, p. 375.

the reports about the Mandla district and Melghat tract in the Amraoti district, fairly well protected in the possession of their lands by special legislation making land inalienable. Another very noteworthy feature of the social history of the non-protected areas in the Central Provinces is the conscious organization of the Gonds to protect their rights in some cases at least. The Gonds of Balaghat brought their Powar masters to their senses by organizing themselves and refusing to work for them on the degrading conditions to which they were reduced.¹⁷ They also took part in political movements. Thus they joined the non-cooperation movement of 1920-21, the Nagpur flag-*satyagraha* of 1923, and the forest-*satyagraha* of 1930.¹⁸ The last participation in a political movement was rather significant, and was noticed at fair length in the annual report on the conditions in India, intended for submission to the British Parliament. The analysis of the successful appeal to the Gonds given by the writer of the report deserves careful notice. He observes: "This aspect of the movement [forest-*satyagraha*] appealed particularly to the aboriginal jungle tribes such as the Gonds, who form a considerable proportion of the population of the Province; and their low order of intelligence, and the fact that the operation of the Forest Laws has a direct influence on their way of life, enabled the agitators to achieve a substantial measure of success in fostering unrest among them."¹⁹

It is clear that the expedient of a Scheduled District or a Backward Tract has hardly proved itself superior, in the matter of protecting the interests of the so-called aborigines in their lands, to the normal constitutional machinery at the disposal of a fairly sympathetic administration.

The history of safeguarding their interests in forests has not a very dissimilar tale to narrate. The forest-area of the Santal Parganas lay in the Government estate of the Daman-i-Koh, which, as we have seen, was directly administered as a non-Regulation tract. There was neither a proper survey nor a settlement of that region for a long time, and the cultivable

17 "The Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat District," pp. 49, 74.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

19 "India in 1930-31," p. 554.

land, waste and jungle, was all used by the Paharias and the Santals as their own land. The case of the Santals was slightly different from that of the Paharias, who were assured of the free enjoyment of these lands in 1823 when Government reviewed Sutherland's report on the Daman-i-Koh, and appointed Ward to demarcate it. In 1862, there arose the question of applying the ordinary rules about waste-land to the estate. But the Government concluded that the wastelands, though they were Government's property, could not be given away without the consent of the Paharias. It seems the Government of India was approached on the subject, and it also decided that the hillmen had the right of occupancy even in the uninhabited hills as they utilized their jungle-products and might cultivate them any time. In 1871, a scheme for demarcating Government forests in the estate was formulated. But as there were signs of unrest among the Santals at that time, the project was laid aside. During the regime of Sir Richard Temple as Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, in 1876, notwithstanding the previous promise, the former opinion of the local Government and the then recent decision of the Government of India, an area of about 36 square miles was declared to be a reserved forest. Next year its management was transferred to the Deputy Commissioner, as it was felt that its administration by the Forest Department might lead to a strict system of conservancy. One year after the settlement of 1879, prohibition of cutting the *sal* trees in the settled area was issued. The process of declaring areas as forests progressed apace; and, in 1894, all land belonging to Government and not settled with cultivators was constituted protected forest, "subject to all existing rights of individuals or communities" in the country of the Sauria Paharias. By then the management of the forest had come under its proper department, viz., the Forest Department. The departmental management, in spite of the clear recognition by Government of the rights of the Sauria Paharias, began to entail hardships on them. In 1900, therefore, out of the forest-area of 153 square miles in their country, all excepting 10 square miles, was transferred to the charge of the Deputy Commissioner. In 1910, the same arrangement had continued, the Forest Department

having a forest area of 292 square miles under its management.²⁰

In Kolhan, in Singhbhum, the same policy of reserving more and more forest area was followed. In this way more than 700 square miles of area have been taken out of the hands of the Hos, thus forcing them to devote more labour to their fields and cultivable wastes.²¹

In Kondmals, there are neither reserved nor protected forests. There does not seem to be any rule or restriction regarding them. The demarcation of reserved forests has been recently undertaken. In the Ganjam agency there is some reserved forest area. The Orissa Committee observes: "As it appears, the Khonds are in an advantageous position so far as the forests are concerned. They enjoy greater concessions than the Savaras and other aborigines. The forest is plentiful in Khond areas, but in the Savara area, forests are not available to such an extent." And yet it would seem the reserved forests are in the Savara area. The Savaras are given some rights in the forests, both reserved and unreserved. Though in Koraput, formerly Vizagapatam agency, fairly large areas, measuring more than 1,600 square miles, are kept as reserved and protected forests, the scheme of forest rearing does not seem to have been properly carried out over large tracts. The shifting cultivation of the tribes has destroyed valuable forests both here and in Ganjam. It seems in most of these areas the Madras Forest Act of 1882 has been in operation.²²

The forest policy in the Central Provinces was much influenced by the consideration that the forest tracts, inhabited by the so-called aborigines, contained not only valuable sources of timber, firewood, and other jungle products, but also mineral riches of a varied nature. There are also some of the best grazing grounds. The forest tracts comprised a large part of the resources of the Province. Sir Richard Temple clearly stated in 1863 the policy to be adopted towards shifting cultivation. "It may be hoped that by degrees these hill people will learn a better mode of cultivation. Though rude and

²⁰ "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," pp. 177-180.

²¹ "District Gazetteer of Singhbhum," p. 72.

²² "Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee," Orissa, pp. 63-65, 21-23.

ignorant, they are not destitute of spirit and endurance. They have clans and Chiefs; and they are always predatory; and they have on occasions shown themselves capable of armed resistance. If by a prohibition of their favourite culture they were reduced to any distress, they would resort to plunder, and especially to cattle-stealing. And it is to be remembered that the great pasturage whither the cattle from the plain districts resort, is situated in their country; and if they were not in the country, the last state of the forests would be worse than the first, for then the traces of human habitation, settlement, and clearance would disappear. The foresters and the woodmen could no longer live in, or even enter into, the wilderness, rank and malarious with uncleared jungle, and overrun with wild beasts. These animals are already so destructive as to constitute a real difficulty. The only check upon their becoming masters of the forests is the presence of the hill tribes."²³ Thus the preservation of the forest and hill people was a part and parcel of the natural economy of the region and consequently of the forest policy. The fruits of such a policy were the attempts made to settle the Baigas which were characterized, as Dr. Hutton puts it, by "some measure of generosity."

From this it may be justly concluded that forest policy in the tracts specially protected under the expedient of a Scheduled District or a Backward Tract has tended to be moulded neither in the best combined interests of the protected people and the general community, nor again always to the best advantage of the one or the other of them. On the other hand, in the non-protected areas it has not necessarily affected the interests of the so-called aborigines more adversely than those of the general community.

The history of the handling of the drink-question reveals much more the futility of the constitutional device for safeguarding the interests of the so-called aborigines. There is nothing to show that the excise policy was in any way affected by the special kind of administration existing in the Santal Parganas. Nor do the officers in charge of the district

²³ Hislop: "Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces," pp. V-VI.

and specifically of the interests of the aborigines seem to have influenced the policy in any manner. The policy moves backwards and forwards as usual. Up to 1890 there was the "outstill" system which was later changed to "central distillery" system and, in 1907-08, the latter was combined with the contract system. There is nothing to indicate that these changes were due to any consciousness that something must be done to counteract the evil of drink, brought to notice as one of the main causes of the backwardness of the so-called aborigines. Three kinds of drink were manufactured and sold: (i) spirit from *Mahua* flowers, (ii) rice-beer, "the national drink of the aborigines," and (iii) liquor.²⁴

The Hos of Kolhan in Singhbhum have been allowed to suffer terribly from the "outstill" system. In 1934, the non-official members of the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council "prayed for an enquiry into the effects of the outstill system in the coal areas and other districts, but the Council decided otherwise."²⁵ Among the Oraons rice-beer is a necessary offering at most religious festivals except those connected with the worship of some deities borrowed from the Hindus.²⁶ In the Ranchi district till 1908 the "outstill" system prevailed; but thereafter "central distillery" system was introduced in some parts, while the other system was retained in others. The aborigines have been allowed to brew their variety of liquor for domestic consumption. Yet the figures of the consumption of country liquor issued through the Excise Department have remained high.²⁷ In the Manbhum district in 1907, the "outstill" system was substituted by the "contract distillery system," and the contract was given to Messrs. Carew & Co. of Asansol.²⁸

In Mirzapur the first system was that tracts were farmed out to contractors who had to make their own arrangements for the supply of liquor. In 1863 the farming system was replaced by the "central distillery" system. The arrangements under the system did not work well for the excise receipts in

²⁴ "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," pp. 234-35.

²⁵ D. N. Majumdar: "A Tribe in Transition," p. 43.

²⁶ S. C. Roy: "The Oraons of Chota Nagpur," p. 169.

²⁷ "District Gazetteer of Ranchi" (1917), pp. 204-05.

²⁸ "District Gazetteer of Manbhum," p. 247.

the southern part of the tahsil. "The remote and hilly nature of the country and the proximity of native states combined with the greater cost of the distillery liquor to encourage wholesale smuggling and illicit distillation." The farming was therefore "speedily resorted to." But in 1896 the system of licensed "outstill" was introduced, and continued to be the system in Robertsgunj tahsil, when the district gazetteer was compiled in 1909, though in the other parts of the district the "distillery" system was in force.²⁹

As pointed out in another connection, the Konds of Kondmals about 1871 expressed a desire to put a stop to their drinking habit, and were prepared to co-operate with Government in any reasonable measure. Whether the challenge was taken up is not clear from the literature available to us. In the Ganjam and Vizagapatam agencies, as stated in a work of 1885, "a notification of the Board of Revenue, dated 29th July 1873, permitting the home manufacture of fermented liquor for bona fide domestic consumption in the Agency tract" had the force of law.³⁰ Yet the usual excise policy, vacillating between "central distillery" and "outstill" systems, was introduced. As we know, the Orissa Konds started a temperance movement in 1908. They were very serious about it, having realized that their drink habits were responsible for their loss of lands. They went to the extent of asking Government to close all liquor shops. When the question of asking Government to close liquor shops was being discussed in their meeting, some of them proposed that arrangement to make liquor available to them for their religious rites would have to be made. But they were simply howled down, the whole question in their minds being inseparable from that of land.³¹ We have also seen that according to O'Malley, their request was granted and liquor shops in their midst were closed down. This experiment was started in 1910 under Mr. Ollenbach, who had considerable influence with the Konds. Yet in the opinion of Mr. Alderson, the experiment has been a failure, while, in the opinion of the Orissa Committee for the Partially Excluded Areas, total prohibition is not in ex-

²⁹ "District Gazetteer of Mirzapur," pp. 183-4.

³⁰ "Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency," Vol. 1, p. 70 ff.

³¹ "Census of India," 1911, "Bengal Report," p. 511.

istence in Kondmals. The reasons for such a state of affairs are alleged to be the need of Konds for liquor on all religious and social occasions and the lack of adequate excise staff. In the Ganjam agency, in some parts the Konds have to take licences for the home manufacture of liquor for domestic use and the non-Konds are under total prohibition. In other parts both the Konds and Savaras can distil liquor for bona fide home consumption without being required to take out licences. Excepting some hills inhabited by Savaras and Konds, which are non-excite areas and some areas with "outstill" system, in the rest of the Koraput district the "central distillery" system has been in force since 1905.³²

The Gonds, too, require liquor, preferably home-brewed, in connection with their religious rites. But as we have seen the excise policy was not much influenced by this need of the Gonds. Officials every now and then pointed out clearly the havoc drink was causing among the aborigines. The usual response to it, as we have noticed, was a change from the "outstill" to the "central distillery" system or vice versa. And the Gonds' need for liquor is reflected only in a general provision contained in paragraph 304 of the Excise Manual, Vol. I, "for not imposing sentences of imprisonment on the aboriginals for petty cases of illicit distillation."³³ The provision does not seem to have been taken seriously by the officials concerned. We have referred to some of the tribal movements among the Gonds which, among other things, aimed at stopping the drink-habit among them. A temperance movement, much more earnest and extensive, was started in Mandla, during the regime of Sir Reginald Craddock (1907-1912), by one of the members of the backward tribes. The people seem to have realized that drink was their ruin to such an extent that the movement made progress for a considerable time. But thereafter, it would appear, for some unknown reason, it dwindled away, leaving the original state of affairs intact.³⁴

In the Bhil tracts, the policy was the usual one without any modification, and was largely dictated by revenue needs.

³² Op. cit. pp. 62, 20.

³³ Note by the Deputy Commissioner of Raipur in the Census Report of the C. P. & Berar, 1931. p. 401.

³⁴ "Parliamentary Debates" (Fifth series), Vol. 301, col. 1352.

The Bhils, too, appear to require liquor, as indeed the Varlis and others, for their socio-religious practices. Yet in the Mewasi estates the only step that was proposed to be taken was to utilize the surplus of excise revenue for the development of the area. As we have seen, the step was never actually taken. Thus the Bhils were left to drink themselves to poverty and degradation.

Whether an area inhabited by the so-called aborigines was a Scheduled District, a Backward Tract, or not, excise policy was more or less the same, viz., to allow the aborigines to drink as much as they could afford. Their special needs were recognized in one or two tracts. In other areas, though some concession could have been shown, actually it does not seem to have been the case. Under religious impelling some of the aborigines were forced to practise illicit distillation and were naturally the object of unsavoury attention of the excise staff.

Konds, as we have seen, were ready for prohibition very early, notwithstanding their religious requirements. They were fortunate in some areas to have had sympathetic officers who helped them toward that goal to some extent at least. Yet, as already observed, the movement did not bear the fruit it promised. The reasons for its failure are not clear. We have also mentioned a serious attempt on the part of Gonds in the direction of temperance, the earnestness of which is vouchsafed by Sir Reginald Craddock. The Rev. T. Withams and Mr. Kelkar have also referred to its strength, the latter maintaining that it should have rendered unnecessary any Prohibition Act. Here again the reasons for the failure of the movement are not clear. Once again, in 1920-21, the Gonds, this time urged by political propaganda which partly appealed to ignorance and prejudice, started the anti-drink movement, and somehow or other continued it till 1924. Mr. C. U. Wills' criticism of it presents the usual official attitude to the temperance movement, an attitude which seems to be shared by Mr. Grigson and, as we have seen, endorsed by Mr. Elwin. Mr. Wills observes: "The . . . force behind these efforts at reform is not a conviction that the physiological effect of spirit or fermented liquor is bad, or that

it is best to forego these . . . in the physical interest of the community; the object is simply to enhance the reputation of the particular caste in the local social hierarchy."³⁵ Is it wrong to use the machinery of social opprobrium and social approval for the betterment of individuals and communities? Mr. Symington rightly discerns in the admission of the Bhils, that though the Hindus do not use liquor in their socio-religious rites and functions, they do not suffer from supernatural wrath, the starting point of a change in outlook. And he has no hesitation in proposing that prohibition should be enforced among them, the drink-habit being at the root of their poverty and degradation.³⁶

We have seen that some of the conscious or unwitting effects of the introduction of British rule over the aborigines were good in so far as they related to the stamping out of certain very savage practices and customs, or to the softening of the beliefs and attitudes in regard to the witches or to the practice of certain festivals. But if Rowney's authority is to be trusted, among some aborigines, who were not specially protected, more or less similar results had followed the introduction of Hindu culture in close contact with them.³⁷ In the earlier period, British arms and British administrative tact both proved useful and successful in settling the more turbulent tribes to a peaceful life devoted more or less to ordinary pursuits, however crudely followed. The more sanguinary and reprehensible customs were put down with a firm hand and generous dealing. Once the turbulent tribes had become peaceful, the method, which proved so useful in subduing and pacifying them and which may be called the method of indirect rule with the help of almost absolute powers vested in the executive head of the district or the tract, was stereotyped and adhered to. The fact that, even after the establishment of almost absolute executive control of the areas, many of the tribes concerned rose in rebellion over and over again, or almost came to the point of doing so in the desperate attempts to redress more or less the same grievances, affords clear proof

³⁵ Quoted in "The Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat District," pp. 74-76.

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 63-66.

³⁷ H. B. Rowney: "Wild Tribes of India," pp. 7, 9, 14, 216.

of the partial failure of the administrative expedient to take proper care of their welfare.

While the restrictive or negative measures for safeguarding the interests of the protected people thus came generally after the hardships were very keenly felt, of more positive steps for the welfare of the aborigines there is very little evidence. The practice of shifting cultivation was allowed to be indulged in by the Konds because of their special circumstances. Hardly any attempt was made to teach them the art of plough-cultivation. The peaceful and docile Korwas and Bihors of the protected tract of Chota Nagpur, on the other hand, were left to shift for themselves, when the lands which they had been accustomed to use for their shifting cultivation came to be either included in the reserved forests or to be taken up for cultivation by settled agriculturists. Neither were areas reserved for them, nor were they tried to be settled as plough-cultivators. The Baigas, who were not protected through the expedient of a Scheduled District, were very much better treated by the Government of the Central Provinces. The case of the Bhils and the other so-called aborigines of the Bombay Presidency was also handled in a more sympathetic manner.

The effects of this indirect rule through the expedient of a Scheduled District in regard to the general welfare of the people are far from encouraging. The Paharias, enjoying the benefits of protected status and indirect rule for about a hundred and fifty years, are found in more or less the same barbaric and miserable conditions in which they were found by the British at the beginning of their contact with them. We have seen that Bradley-Birt considered the Santals to have remained in their backward condition unchanged after sixty years of protection and special treatment; and there is reason to think that thirty-five years more of the same rule have not materially modified their wild nature and indifferent economic condition. The Konds, after a century of indirect rule under the benevolence of the district head, have registered no progress in their condition or in the cultivation of gainful arts. Dr. D. N. Majumdar's verdict on the effects of official protection of the Scheduled District type on the Hos is even more unfavourable to it. He observes: "The system of indirect

rule, as is prevalent in Kolhan, has many drawbacks which have engendered among the Hos certain vices."³⁸ The following description of the general characteristics of the aborigines under their charge given by the Government of Bihar and Orissa about 1930 reads very much like the account given by Bradley-Birt in 1905 and is not far different from the one that can be gathered from earlier authorities. "They are in ordinary circumstances cheerful; hardworking folk, with a keen sense of self-respect, honest, truthful, and courageous. Their defects are inordinate love of drink and improvidence. Further they can be readily stirred up to violence, and their ignorance and credulity make them an easy prey to misrepresentation. They cannot compete against the subtler minds of the Aryan races that have in the past two or three centuries penetrated slowly into the country; their improvidence lays them open to the wiles of the money-lender; their lack of education and their distinctive language place them at a great disadvantage in the Courts. When roused to action by real or fancied grievances their tribal organization, where it survives, and elsewhere the solidarity of kinship, makes for a rapid spread of disaffection, while their childlike outlook makes the duty of restoring order a peculiarly distasteful one." And they themselves admit that "the aborigines as a whole have not radically changed in character during the last 70 years." They think that no radical change can come about save by the spread of education. And yet it is admitted that "the constructive work of so educating him [the aboriginal] as to enable him to stand on his own feet has scarcely begun."³⁹ This is in itself an indictment of the constitutional protection which the so-called aborigines of Bihar have enjoyed for one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy-five years at least. As we have seen, what was done during the twenty years or so previous to the observations quoted above to spread education among them, was very little. And contact, after all, is one of the best educative processes, provided it is properly supervised.

³⁸ "A Tribe in Transition," p. 14.

³⁹ "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. XII, pp. 340, 345, 346; Vol. I, p. 71.

We may conclude from this survey of what was achieved for the so-called aborigines who were protected through the device of a Scheduled District or a Backward Tract, and from the actual condition of those who were not so protected, that, to say the least, the former method does not show superiority over the latter treatment. Nay, it actually tends to keep the so-called aborigines in their old ways, to preserve them, in a way, changeless amidst a flux.

While a close study of the history of the treatment of the so-called aborigines thus leads one to the conclusion that the device of a Scheduled District or a Backward Tract has survived its utility rather too long, even a cursory peep into the history of the exploitation of the natural resources of the region under survey and of the employment of some of these people in the process, creates a presumption that all that was being done was not necessarily in the sole interests of these people or even of the general community. The coal-fields of Burdwan and Manbhum had begun to be worked by European commercial interests since 1920.⁴⁰ The railway companies requiring their labour were similarly non-Indian. The Santals and others are very often described as liking work in the mines and tea-gardens. Tea-plantations, too, were European commercial ventures.⁴¹ The exploitation of jungle products in parts of the Central Provinces was proceeding on behalf of these interests, while at the eastern end European individuals had established factories. They were even encouraged to buy large landed estates at easy rates with a view to their settling down in the colder parts of the region.⁴² The following observations of Forsyth leave no doubt about the policy. "The stick-lac is manufactured into dye in considerable quantities at a factory in Jubbulpore, established by a gentleman (Mr. Williams) who has long since retired after realizing the success so well deserved by his remarkable foresight and enterprise. The agents of this factory penetrate the remotest corners of these jungles in search of the raw material; and the development of this profitable business, during many years of

40 "District Gazetteer of Manbhum," pp. 172-175.

41 Bradley-Birt: "The Story of an Indian Upland," pp. 217-219; Forsyth: loc. cit., p. 73; Russell and Hiralal: loc. cit., III, p. 519; Baines: loc. cit., p. 118; O'Malley: "Modern India and the West," p. 729.

42 Bradley-Birt, *Ibid.*, p. 197; Forsyth, loc. cit., pp. 160, 380.

patient and fair dealing with these timid savages, is a valuable example to those who would follow Mr. Williams' steps in the development of the many latent resources of these regions."⁴³ He proposed that the Mandla plateau, or savannahs as he called it, should be opened up for permanent cultivation without any detriment to the cattle of the region, and described the difficulties in the way of implementing the proposal. Further, he frankly stated the reasons that prompted him to make the proposal and to narrate the difficulties. He says: "Many other tracts besides this are almost similarly circumstanced, though perhaps there are none which can be compared with it in extent and importance, or in the advantages it offers to the settler, and especially to the European settler. I am not one of those who believe that Europeans can here labour profitably with their own hands in the 'plains' of India. . . . But I think that we have here a tract eminently fitted to yield results from the application of European energy, intelligence, and capital to the supervision and direction of native labour. The great difficulty would be to obtain the labour to supervise. I doubt if the regular Hindu cultivators of the plains outside could be induced to move into these wilds by any temptation, so long as they can obtain a pittance where they are. I would rather look to the teeming millions of the coast districts to furnish the needful supply of labourers, if these island wastes are to be reclaimed within any reasonable period of time."⁴⁴ The rules for the sale and lease of waste lands in the Central Provinces stated, among other things, the maximum size of individual holding and the rate, both in terms of Indian and British money, at which the lands were available. They stated that almost all the lands were surveyed, and concluded with the following sentence, "The valuable wastes of the Mandla District, however, which are the most attractive to Europeans, are still unsurveyed."⁴⁵ In the light of these rules, Forsyth's comment thereon is instructive. He remarks: "None but a capitalist can now practically occupy the waste lands so as to secure a legal proprietary title; and the aborigine never has such capital as would enable him to do so."⁴⁶

⁴³ Forsyth, *loc. cit.*, p. 367.

⁴⁴ Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 458-459.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

When the Indian Statutory Commission came to India to study the political conditions and formulate proposals for the promised constitutional advance, the various Provincial Governments submitted their memoranda, giving a survey of the working of the previous instalment of political reforms and their proposals for further changes. Though, it appears, in Bombay, the United Provinces, and the Central Provinces, there were still some areas which had continued to be treated as Scheduled Districts, their Governments said nothing in their memoranda about them or about the so-called aborigines. A perusal of their memoranda leaves on the reader the impression that there was no such thing as the problem of the aborigines in these Provinces. In Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and Madras, as we have seen, there were Backward Tracts, outside the operation of the Reforms in varying degrees. In the memorandum of the Bengal Government a bare statement about the Backward Tracts is given. Similar is the case with Madras. The Bihar Government made a full report on the Backward Tracts and gave reasons for their conclusions regarding future arrangements. The Government as a whole was agreed that protection to the so-called aborigines was still needed, but, as regards the extent of it, it appears the Reserved half and the Responsible half differed. The Governor in Council opined that the then existing degree of protection should be retained, with only suitable alterations to fit in with the new constitutional frame-work. Angul was entirely excluded from the scope of the Reforms, and continuance of the same status was advocated. The Provincial Government, on the other hand, agreed only to the general principle of some protection, "some members" being "anxious that careful enquiries should be undertaken to determine whether" it was "possible to make some further advance in dispensing with special forms of protection" then in force.⁴⁷

In the Central Provinces, besides the Scheduled Districts, there were at least two others which were excluded from the franchise, one of them being granted the franchise in 1926. About them the Statutory Commission was "informed by the provincial Government that all these excluded areas are now

⁴⁷ "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. XII, p. 361.

fit to be treated as part and parcel of the rest of the province."⁴⁸ The Statutory Commission accepted the opinion of the Central Provinces Government and included the areas in the one or two cases of the specially treated tracts which no longer required such treatment. The Commissioners concluded that the then Backward Tracts, with one or two exceptions, must be excluded from the "general constitutional arrangements" and that "special provision must be made for their administration." They proposed a change in the name of this category of territories. They wanted them to be called "excluded areas" and not "backwards tracts." Their grounds for the exclusion of these territories were that "the stage of development reached by the inhabitants" prevented "the possibility of applying to them methods of representation adopted elsewhere," and that the people wanted freedom for "the reasonable exercise of their ancestral customs," "freedom in the pursuit of their traditional methods of livelihood," and "security of land-tenure" rather than self-determination and political advance. They further observed: "Their contentment does not depend so much on rapid political advance as on experienced and sympathetic handling, and on protection from economic subjugation by their neighbours." Owing to financial considerations and the nature of the suggested Provincial Governments, they came to the conclusion that the responsibility toward these people could be adequately discharged only if it rested on the Central Government. They further distinguished the tracts into tracts wholly excluded and those not wholly excluded. Assam tracts, "except perhaps the Khasi and Jaintia hills," were an instance of the first variety, while Chota Nagpur, Sambalpur, the Santal Parganas, and the Madras Agency tracts, those of the latter. The latter were to return representatives to the Provincial Legislatures; and the revenues raised within their borders were to be spent on them, additional funds being allocated by the Central Government. The Governor, as agent of the Governor-General in Council, was to administer the tracts, with some latitude allowed to him by rules to act in consultation with his Ministers. The former category was to

⁴⁸ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 73.

be administered by the Governor-General in Council using the agency of the Governors. In the Federal Assembly the inhabitants of the excluded areas, the so-called aborigines evidently, were to be represented through nomination by the Governor-General. They were to be eleven in a house of 250 to 280 persons.⁴⁹

It is seen that the main argument for the exclusion of certain tracts from the proposed constitutional frame-work is not only that the inhabitants are politically backward, making the institution of political machinery rather difficult or impossible, which was the only ground on which Montague and Chelmsford had recommended their being excluded from the Reforms, but also that the inhabitants, at least the aboriginals, desire and have a right to live their own life and to carry on their own pursuits, and that they need economic protection. As we have tried to show, economic protection was being given to the so-called aborigines even in the areas which were not specially protected. Even though they did not desire political advance in the majority of the excluded tracts, they were to elect their representatives to the Provincial Legislatures. In spite of this political apathy, their representatives were further to be nominated to the Federal Assembly, even though the administration of their tracts was to be vested in the Governors as agents of the Governor-General in Council. Perhaps their representation in the Provincial Legislatures was meant to satisfy the non-aboriginals, resident in the excluded tracts. But the acknowledgement of the right of the so-called aborigines to follow their traditional pursuits, like the practice of shifting cultivation, without any reference to the needs of the welfare of the general community, was the most dangerous doctrine endorsed by the Commissioners, especially when, as we shall see further on, the practice of shifting cultivation is condemned as very obnoxious by most competent authorities. The Commissioners do not appear to have considered the position of the people, other than the so-called aborigines inhabiting the areas proposed to be excluded from the new political machinery. Much less do they give their thought to the proportions of such people in the various areas, unless we discover it in

⁴⁹ Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 108-112, 122, 119.

the distinction of the two categories of excluded areas made by them. But if this distinction was based on the consideration of the varying proportions of the non-aborigines in the different areas, it must be declared to be too broad to meet the situation. Under the Government of India Act of 1919, as we have seen, there were, in reality, as many as six varying degrees of exclusion which reflect the complexity of the situation, if the rights and desires of the non-aborigines of the Backward Tracts are to be given any consideration.

To enable the so-called aborigines to live their life according to their traditions and customs without active interference from non-aborigines, is certainly desirable and as natural as the grant of responsibility in the administration to the other people. But to exclude the tracts from the operation of the full constitution for this purpose implies that facilities for such a life are likely to be denied by the general community, if the so-called aborigines are placed under the same political and administrative machinery. It is essential to examine the rationale of this implication. The attitude of the general community in the past is the best index to its probable conduct in the future. We have narrated what was being done in the Central Provinces and in Bombay for the amelioration of the condition of the Gonds and others, and the Bhils. In the Central Provinces the Land Alienation Act was amended to suit the situation as it arose. In Bombay a special committee was set up to advise the steps to be taken to help the aborigines in their struggle for existence. The Government of Bombay reported that the aboriginal people had "not suffered in the least" under the administration of the municipalities and of the local boards which were quite ready to help them. The District Local Board was maintaining four free boarding schools for the Bhils in West Khandesh. Their needs regarding communications and water-supply were sympathetically attended to. And the Legislative Council was generally sympathetic to the needs of the Backward Classes.⁵⁰ In the declared Backward Tracts, too, it appears, the attitude of the Transferred half of the Government and therefore of the general community was not such as to require the use of spe-

cial powers. The Bihar and Orissa Government stated that the Governor had to make very small use of the special power conferred on him under section 52 A (2) of the Government of India Act of 1919.⁵¹

The British Government in its proposals accepted the principle of exclusion. Accordingly the Government of India Bill as it came up for discussion contained a section, 91, which embodied the procedure for declaring areas to be excluded, whether wholly or partially, and provision for transferring areas from the "excluded" category to the "partially excluded" one and from the latter to the constitutionally normal areas of the Province. The declaration of areas either as "excluded" or as "partially excluded" was to be made through a schedule. Accordingly the Government introduced along with the Section 91, a schedule, then known as the Sixth Schedule, laying down its proposals. In part I of the Schedule were included the following areas, called "Excluded Areas": (i) the North-East Frontier (Sadiya, Balipara, and Lakhimpur) Tracts; (ii) the Naga Hills District; (iii) the Lushai Hills, and (iv) the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Part II of the Schedule contained the following as "Partially Excluded Areas": (i) the North Cachar Hills; (ii) the Garo Hills District; (iii) the Mikir Hills (in Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts); (iv) the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, other than the Shillong Municipality and Cantonment; (v) the District of Angul; (vi) the Chota Nagpur Division; (vii) the District of Sambalpur; (viii) the Santal Paraganas District; (ix) the Darjeeling District; (x) the Laccadive Islands, including Minicoy; and (xi) the Ganjam, Vizagapatam, and Godavari Agencies.⁵²

Comparing this list of excluded areas with the list of "Backward Tracts" under the Government of India Act of 1919, one finds that two tracts which were more or less of the wholly excluded type under the Act of 1919 are entirely omitted from the new list. According to this proposal Spiti and Lahaul would have been administered under the normal constitution of the Province. No new tract is added in either

51 "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. XII, p. 349.

52 N. Rajagopala Aiyangar: "The Govt. of India Act, 1935," p. 110.

category. From the earlier list of wholly excluded tracts only one, the Chittagong Hills Tract, is retained in that category in the new list. Laccadive Islands, Angul, and Darjeeling districts are transferred to the category of "Partially Excluded Areas." The Ganjam, Vizagapatam, and Godavari Agencies, which were governed by the Governor in Council and therefore belonged more to the wholly "excluded" rather than to the "partially excluded" category, are definitely in the latter class. The Assam tracts, which in the original list had figured among the real "partially excluded" variety, but were later, through the use of his special powers by the Governor in Council, placed midway between the wholly excluded and partially excluded categories, are divided more or less equally between the two varieties. Thus in the case of Assam tracts, exclusion was extended slowly and by stages. As we have seen, even after the operation of the 1919 Act, some of the Scheduled Districts, which had failed to find a place in the list of "Backward Tracts," had continued to be administered more or less as Scheduled Districts. One area, the Mandla District, in the Central Provinces, was without the right of the franchise till 1926, while two others, Sironcha Tahsil of Chanda District and Melghat Taluk of Amraoti District, were so till the date of the Bill. None of these areas were listed in this Schedule. The British Government seems to have carried out more or less faithfully the spirit of the proposals of the Indian Statutory Commission in the matter of the number and specification of the tracts and their division into "excluded" and "partially excluded" categories. It seems even the Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament did not demur to this list either as regards the number of the tracts included in the Schedule or as regards their distribution between the two categories.

Of the discussion that took place in the House of Commons in Committee over the provisions of the Government of India Bill, that on the Sixth Schedule was perhaps the most all-sided. Colonel Wedgwood was not only dissatisfied with the number of tracts included in the Schedule, but even with the administrative machinery laid down for them in Section 92 of the Bill. He pointed out that according to some esti-

mates the number of people belonging to backward tribes was 4,30,00,000 and that the Schedule afforded the kind of defective protection laid down in Section 92 to only 1,30,00,000 of them. He said: "We should try and increase the number of tribes so protected." He mentioned that he had received "an infinity of letters from India" urging that the tribes should be allowed to be looked after by Indians. But he thought that the educated Indians wanted "to get them in as cheap labour." He further denied the possibility of Indians being able to look after the tribal people unless they had the experience of the fifty or even the hundred and fifty years of dealings with them which Englishmen had. He stressed the African parallel and even reminded Mr. Churchill of the great part he had played in protecting the African aborigines. He was convinced that the best hope for backward tribes everywhere lay in the Christian missionaries. In his opinion the problem was simple enough. "All that is required is that for another twenty or thirty years we should have administration by anthropologists and people whose whole trend is to develop and preserve all that is best in these native tribes." He pointed out that they were the aboriginal inhabitants of India who had to be protected from a civilization which will destroy them. He was, therefore, not prepared to allow them to be governed even by the Governors of the various Provinces, because the Provincial tendency "must always be to bring the excluded areas into the same position as the rest of India." He said: "I and many of my friends in the House desire that the backward tribes of India should remain under the British control."⁵³

The Secretary of State for India, Sir Samuel Hoare, stated in reply that the Government recognized the danger of imposing criminal and civil codes framed for the conduct of affairs of the civilized communities on the backward races, and what was attempted in the Schedule was to include such areas as were more or less self-contained after full consultation with the experts in India. He further pointed out that even among Indians there was a school of administrators who had

⁵³ "Parliamentary Debates," Fifth Series (referred to herein as P. D.), Vol. 299, cols. 1550, 1549, 1548; Vol. 301, col. 1418.

specially studied the kind of problems involved in the administration of backward tribes.⁵⁴

Mr. Edward Cadogan, who was a member of the Indian Statutory Commission and a signatory to its report and also of the Joint Select Committee, moved an amendment to the Sixth Schedule. The amendment sought to add to the list of "excluded areas" in the first part of the Schedule the following: (i) Almora District; (ii) Garhwal; (iii) part of Mandla District; (iv) part of Chanda District; (v) parts of Ranchi, Singhbhum, and Santal Parganas Districts; (vi) part of Angul District; (vii) Ganjam, Vizagapatam, and Godavari Agencies; (viii) Spiti; (ix) Lahaul; (x) North Cachar Hills; (xi) Mikir Hills; (xii) Laccadive Islands; and (xiii) the Nallamalai Hills. It is seen that the real additions, not included in the Schedule, are Spiti and Lahaul; Almora and Garhwal; Mandla and Chanda and the Nallamalai Hills. The rest of the areas proposed to be included in the "excluded" category are only transfers from the other category to this. The number of areas proposed to be included in the second part of the Schedule is large, and they are all real additions. None of them was a Backward Tract under the Act of 1919, nor even a Schedule District under the earlier dispensation. Almost all the hills in the Madras Presidency figure in the "partially excluded" category. Two whole districts of the Central Provinces, viz., Seoni and Chindwara, and parts of the Mandla, Chanda, Nimar, Betul, Raipur, Drug, and Bilaspur Districts, are also there. To this list of the C. P. areas Major Colfox suggested the addition of parts of Balaghat and Amraoti Districts. As for the Bombay Presidency, Mr. Cadogan suggested in his amendment the inclusion of parts of East Khandesh and Panch Mahals Districts and the whole districts of Thana, West Khandesh, and Surat.⁵⁵

Major Attlee, another signatory to the report of the Indian Statutory Commission, supported the amendment for enlarging the Schedule, remarking: "We ought to err on the side of inclusion [in the Schedule] and not on the side of exclusion." He was convinced that the people, sought to be spe-

54 "Parliamentary Debates," Vol. 299, cols. 1552-1554.

55 "Parliamentary Debates," Vol. 301, cols. 1343, 1344, 1350.

cially treated, were easily liable to exploitation and therefore deserved protection. But his difficulty was one regarding proper administration. He wanted a special cadre of officers for certain backward areas so that they could be "dealt with by people who have a special interest in them."⁵⁶ Wing-Commander James was another strong supporter of the amendment. He was sure that the backward tribes were "quite distinct from the bulk of the population."⁵⁷ He pointed out that though according to the census of 1931 the Central Provinces contained 40,65,000 aborigines and the Bombay Presidency, 28,41,000 of them, not a single area from those Provinces was included in the Sixth Schedule. The Schedule was therefore very defective. He urged the argument that the backward areas were either directly administered by Europeans who had sympathy with these peoples, or by Indians only under European supervision. He was concerned about the hardships which recruiting in these areas for labour on tea-gardens caused to the people.⁵⁷

Sir Reginald Craddock wondered why the Sambalpur District was included in the Schedule. He said: "It is a small district, but the people are highly litigious, and it is certainly not one which I should have either excluded or partially excluded." On the other hand, he thought that Mandla District deserved to be specially treated.⁵⁸

Lord Eustace Percy called the backward tracts or excluded areas "a neglected garden." He observed: "The fact is that we are dealing with a number of areas, which under the old administration of the Government of India, before the reforms altogether, had not, perhaps, been dealt with with the discrimination which their particular problems demanded." He pointed out that some of the tracts included in the amendment were already enjoying the reforms of 1919 and were never treated specially under the Scheduled Districts Act and also that to include tracts never before specially treated was a claim made before the Simon Commission as well as before the Joint Select Committee. Further, he contended that some of the areas proposed to be partially excluded had between

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Cols. 1349, 1350.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Cols. 1403, 1403-04, 1405, 1406.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Col. 1351.

25 to 60 per cent only of the aboriginal population. In the following observation he tried to raise an important issue so that the question may be decided on fundamentals, but failed to get adequate response. He remarked: "It is the most difficult problem in the world as to exactly how far you are to keep back in cold storage the aboriginal population, and as to how far you are to lead it on towards absorption into the wider community around it."⁵⁹

Mr. Butler, the then Under Secretary of State for India, put in the official defence of the Schedule. He pointed out that total exclusion created a direct and heavy responsibility for the Governor and that many of the areas proposed in the amendment for total exclusion were already enjoying the reforms of 1919. Total exclusion of such areas "would be received with intense dissatisfaction, and the dissatisfaction arising from such a proposal would operate against the future happiness of the areas which it is proposed should be totally excluded." He then pointed out how some of the areas proposed to be added to the list of "partially excluded areas" were chosen without due regard to facts. For example, the part of Mymensingh District which was included in the amendment had only 34,000 of the Garos, forming only a very small proportion of the total population of the district. The Bombay Government on being asked its opinion about the tracts contained in the amendment opined that they were unsuitable for inclusion in the partially excluded areas. None of them was declared a Backward Tract under the Act of 1919. Moreover, there was no such demand from the people of those tracts. He further stated that in the second part of the Sixth Schedule were included all homogeneous units. The disadvantages of indiscriminate exclusion he stressed in the following words, that should have carried the day, but failed to impress the opponents: "If at this moment we decide on a ring-fence policy and segregate as many areas as we can, we put off to a later date the chance of assimilating the backward areas in the general polity of India, and the Government is certain that if we insist on a policy of wholesale segregation, it will be unlikely to confer a benefit upon the areas com-

59 Ibid., Cols. 1389, 1390, 1392.

mensurate with the discrimination against a majority of the population which would be felt by certain classes in India whom we wish to interest in these matters."⁶⁰

Earl Winterton went even further in his criticism of the amendment. He testified from personal experience in his past official capacity to the feeling of complete sympathy with the excluded areas shown by the Indian Governments and their officials, whether Indian or British. He observed: "I believe far more in assimilation than in isolation. I do not think you want to turn areas into modern Whipsnades where you have picturesque survivals and where Englishmen are able to go out and say, 'This is a most interesting ethnological race of people divided by 500 or 1,000 years from the rest of India.'"⁶¹ Mr. Cadogan interjected: "That is exactly what the Government are doing." Earl Winterton retorted that Mr. Cadogan by his amendment was going much beyond his own conclusion on the matter recorded in the report of the Statutory Commission. He thought that except in the case of the areas included in the Schedule and possibly one or two others, it would be "in the interests of the Province as a whole and of the tribes themselves to be administered under the ordinary administration."⁶¹

Supporters of the amendment were mainly guided by the fact that once the Sixth Schedule was passed there was no means of adding to the excluded areas in future. The Bill only provided for transferring an "excluded area" to the "partially excluded" category and the latter to the normal one, but neither for changing the latter over to the former category nor for including a fresh area in the partially excluded areas. Summarizing the discussion Prof. Keith observes: "The weight of the contention was serious, and the governmental argument that it was difficult to delimit areas owing to the scattered condition of the aboriginal tribes, and that assimilation was to be aimed at, failed to carry much conviction."⁶² At no stage of the consideration of the problem of the Backward Tracts

⁶⁰ Ibid., Cols. 1395-1401.

⁶¹ Ibid., Cols. 1414-1416. In view of the expressions used by members of the Parliament to characterize the constitutional method of protection through exclusion and of the need for employing officers, who would preserve the tribes as they are, stressed in the discussion, Mr. Elwin's strictures ("Loss of Nerve," pp. 45-48), on Indian Nationalists, like Messrs. Aney, Joshi and others, are rather unjust.

⁶² "A Constitutional History of India," p. 315.

or of the discussion of the Sixth Schedule, it appears, a comprehensive statement on the origin of the policy of protection through exclusion, and the results achieved through it, as well as the results in areas not so protected, was either prepared or presented. The discussion leaves the impression that the Government made rather a half-hearted attempt to stand by its proposals or by the experts whom it had consulted, in the face of the all-sided opposition shown to them. Be that as it may, finally it was agreed that the Sixth Schedule should be withdrawn and that the areas to be excluded, totally or partially, should be determined by Order in Council based on facts to be laid before the Parliament.

The India Office addressed a letter to the Government of India on the 7th June, 1935, and asked for a report and proposals to be submitted not later than the 31st December. In the letter clear instructions as to what the Secretary of State, interpreting the wishes of the Parliament, wanted to be done, were given. First, it was pointed out that there was a doubt if the Schedule framed by the Government was comprehensive enough to include "all the aboriginal and other backward tribes which ought not to be subject to the normal consequences of popular Government." Secondly, it was mentioned that there was a feeling that it was "the result of insufficient examination of the needs to be met." What he wanted was a fresh examination, for the adequate conduct of which he laid down certain principles for the guidance of the Government of India. It was pointed out very clearly that the nature of powers under partial exclusion is not such "as to necessitate hesitation to include in that category any area containing a preponderance of aborigines or very backward people which is of sufficient size to make possible the application to it of special legislation and to be susceptible without inconvenience of special administrative treatment." In the actual application of this criterion, what was to be borne in mind was that all those areas to which the Scheduled Districts Act was applied ought *prima facie* to be classified as "partially excluded areas" even though they were not declared Backward Tracts under the Act of 1919. Yet the disadvantages of such exclusion to the non-aboriginal population was to be a relevant

consideration in arriving at the final decision. Whatever might have been the restrictive influence of the last consideration on the extent of exclusion, he left no doubt as to what he wanted. He pointed out that he would not be able to defend the omission of an area from the "partially excluded" category merely on the ground that it had been till then not subject to any special legislation or administrative arrangement.⁶³

The Government of India issued a circular to the Provincial Governments, which in their turn asked the respective district officers to report. The Government of India, on the basis of the district reports and the Provincial recommendations, made their own recommendations, without, it appears, any special enquiry of their own, though sometimes their recommendation was in direct opposition to that of the Provincial Government concerned. Tracts proposed to be listed as Excluded Areas were: (1) the North-East frontier Tracts; (2) the Naga Hills District; (3) the Lushai Hills District; (4) the North Cachar Hills; (5) the Chittagong Hill Tracts; (6) Spiti and Lahaul; (7) the Laccadive Islands (including Minicoy) and the Amindivi Islands; and (8) Upper Tanawal in the Hazara District. The following tracts were proposed to be classed as Partially Excluded Areas: (1) the Garo Hills District; (2) the Mikir Hills; (3) the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, other than the Shillong Municipality and Cantonment; (4) the Darjeeling District; (5) the Sherpur and Susang Parganas of the Mymensingh District; (6) the Jaunsar-Bawar Pargana of the Dehra Dun District; (7) the portion south of the Kaimur range in the Mirzapur District; (8) the Chota Nagpur Division; (9) the Santal Parganas District; (10) the Angul District; (11) the Sambalpur District; (12) the Ganjam, Vizagapatam, and East Godavari Agencies; (13) the Khariar estate in the Raipur District for transfer to Orissa; (14) the Padampur tract for transfer to Orissa and the Satgarh in the Bilaspur District; (15) the Ahiri Zamindaris and Zamindaris of the Garchiroli Tahsil of the Chanda District; (16) the Chindwara Jagirdaris; (17) the Mandla District; (18) the Aundhi, Koracha, Panabaras, and Ambargarh Chowki Zamindaris of the Drug District; (19) the Baihar

63 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, pp. 1157-1158.

Tahsil of the Balaghat District; (20) the Melghat in the Amraoti District; (21) the Bhainsdehi Tahsil of the Betul District; (22) the Nawapur Petha, the Taloda, Nandurbar, and Shahada Taluks, the Akrani Mahal and the Mewasi estates in the West Khandesh District; (23) the Satpura Hills reserved forest area in the East Khandesh District; (24) the Peint Mahal and the Kalvan Taluk of the Nasik District; (25) the Mokhada and Umbergaon Pethas, and the Dahanu and Shapur Taluks of the Thana District; and (26) the Dohad Taluk and the Jhalod Mahal of the Panch Mahals District.⁶⁴

Comparing this list with Mr. Cadogan's list, supplemented by the suggestion of Major Colfox, one finds that the Government of India did not do much to satisfy Mr. Cadogan as regards the totally Excluded Areas. Only two fresh areas, Nos. 6 and 8, are accepted from his list, and two others, Nos. 4 and 7, are transferred from the category of Partially Excluded Areas to the Excluded Areas list. Nine areas included in this category in his amendment, Nos. i to vii and Nos. xi and xiii above, are left out. But in regard to Partially Excluded Areas, the Government of India having taken the view that "the broad effect of partial exclusion is simply to subject the normal legislation and executive jurisdiction of the Province in selected areas to a degree of personal control by the Governor,"⁶⁵ its list accommodates the wishes of Mr. Cadogan to a much greater extent. It makes good some of the omissions in the amendment owing to its being drawn up largely in deference to the direction of the Secretary of State to include all areas which had been Scheduled Districts, only a few areas which figured in the schedule of the Scheduled Districts Act being omitted. On the other hand, the few areas from the Central Provinces, which were excluded from the franchise under the Act of 1919, are included in the list. None of the areas from the Bombay Presidency, excepting two, contained in the list, was ever before specially treated. The Bombay Government was definitely against even partial exclusion of any but one small area, viz., Akrani Mahal and Mewasi

⁶⁴ "Parliamentary Papers," 19, pp. 1191, 1192.

⁶⁵ "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1180.

estates. In its opinion none of them was so backward as to justify exclusion. The Bhils had taken part in the administration of the district and local boards and municipalities. The administration, Provincial and local, had shown active interest in the task of ameliorating the condition of the Bhils, who depended, to some extent, on the general population for their livelihood.⁶⁶ The Madras Presidency was the only fortunate Province to escape unscathed, not a single area out of the many suggested by Mr. Cadogan finding its place in the list of exclusions. On the whole, the list of excluded areas, totally or partially, put up by the Government of India, largely leaves the situation, as regards exclusion, as it was in 1874, barring only certain areas on the frontiers. This means that sixty years of administration, general and special, had not enabled the machinery entrusted with it to do much by way of preparing the people to take care of their interests in a population which, as revealed by our survey and admitted by the Governments of Bihar and Bombay, was largely sympathetic to their cause. This fact itself should be sufficient condemnation of exclusion as a protective measure.

The list was finally embodied in the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936.

Sections 91 and 92 of the Government of India Act of 1935 lay down the main law regarding the delimitation and administration of the areas included in the above Order in Council. Under Section 91, the tracts to be called Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas are to be laid down by Order in Council. His Majesty may at any time by Order in Council direct that an Excluded Area or part of it shall become a Partially Excluded Area or that a Partially Excluded Area or part of it shall cease to be so. But no new tract can be added to the list either of the one category or of the other. Under Section 92, no Act of the Federal or the Provincial Legislature applies to an Excluded or to a Partially Excluded Area unless the Governor directs its application by notification. In applying any Act, the Governor may make such modifications or exceptions as he thinks fit. The Governor may make regulations for the peace and good government of any such

66 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, pp. 1179, 1237, 1240.

area, including regulation for the repeal or amendment of any existing Indian Law. All such regulations are to be forthwith submitted to the Governor-General for his assent in his discretion, and shall be law only when assented to by him. They may be disallowed by the Crown. As regards Excluded Areas, the Governor "shall exercise his functions in his discretion."

The main features distinguishing an Excluded Area from a Partially Excluded Area are these: First, Section 92 (3) read together with Section 50 (1) makes it clear that whereas the Governor is required to exercise his functions in regard to an Excluded Area in his own discretion, in regard to a Partially Excluded Area he is not so required. He may therefore seek the advice of his Ministers in the discharge of his functions in regard to a Partially Excluded Area. The Ministers have the right to tender advice to the Governor in the discharge of his functions in regard to Partially Excluded Areas in the same way as in regard to the normal portion of the Province. They have no such right in the case of an Excluded Area. Though the position of Ministers in regard to a Partially Excluded Area is thus similar to that in the case of the normal portion of a Province, yet the powers of the Governor respecting expenditure are such that we must distinguish between the two positions. The effect of Sections 78, 79, and 80 as regards the expenditure for the normal portion of a Province is that it can be incurred only when duly authorized by a vote of the Legislature except in the case of certain items, declared in Section 78 (3) as charged on the revenues of a Province, and as non-votable. On the other hand, expenditure for a Partially Excluded Area, though votable, does not require to be authorized by the Legislature. The Governor can incur in full the expenditure submitted to the vote of the Legislature, if it rejects or reduces the demand, under Section 80 (1) (b) as being necessary for the due discharge of his special responsibility. The securing of the peace and good government of a Partially Excluded Area is a special responsibility of the Governor under Section 52 (1) (e). Thus whereas in the case of the normal portion of a Province, the Ministers' right to tender advice is backed by the power of the Legislature to withhold expenditure, in the case of a Partially

Excluded Area it is not. The right of the Ministers to tender advice in regard to a Partially Excluded Area is therefore one which can be easily set aside. Further, whereas under Section 50, in the matter of the administration of the normal portion of a Province, the Governor has no other advisers than his Ministers, for a Partially Excluded Area he is empowered in paragraph XV of the Instrument of Instructions to appoint a special officer to advise him regarding measures for the welfare of its inhabitants. Theoretically, there is only slight difference between the political status of an Excluded Area and a Partially Excluded Area, though in practice the difference can be great if the relations between the Governor and his Ministers are such that he relies on them and does not invoke his special responsibility to act more or less in his own discretion. Second, as we have seen, the expenditure in regard to an Excluded Area is non-votable, while the demands in the case of a Partially Excluded Area must be submitted to a vote of the Legislature, though the vote may not ultimately affect the demands. Third, under Section 84 (1) (d) the discussion of or the asking of questions on any matters arising out of or affecting the administration of an Excluded Area is not permitted without the consent of the Governor in his discretion. In respect of a Partially Excluded Area free discussion without the Governor's previous assent is possible.

Though one of the most favourite arguments in favour of exclusion of backward tribes areas from the ordinary administration was the non-preparedness of the backward peoples for parliamentary institutions, yet most of the areas, totally or partially excluded, were given representation in the Provincial Assemblies either through reservation for the members of the backward tribes or without it. In Assam, which contributes four areas to the list of Excluded Areas and three more to that of the Partially Excluded Areas, there are 5 seats to be filled by election from five Backward Areas (Hills) constituencies, 4 more from Backward Tribal (Plains) constituencies, and at least 1 from a general constituency in which is included a part of a Partially Excluded Area. In Bengal there is 1 non-reserved seat for the Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts together. In the electorate for the tea-garden labour seat,

figure the Santals, the Paharias, the Oraons, the Mundas, the Bhuiyas, the Konds, and others. In the United Provinces, South Mirzapur has 1 non-reserved seat, and the Dehra Dun district, of which Jaunsar-Bawar is a pargana, has also one. In Bihar there are 26 seats assigned to various constituencies within the territorial limits of Chota Nagpur Division and the Santal Parganas, out of which 7 are reserved for members of Backward Tribes and 3 for those of Scheduled Castes. In Orissa there are 9 seats to be filled from a number of constituencies of which the Partially Excluded Areas form part; and out of these in 1 constituency, Sambalpur sadr, 1 of the 2 seats is reserved for members of Backward Tribes. In Madras, there is a special constituency electing 1 member of Backward Tribes. In the Central Provinces, too, there is 1 such seat, and in addition the Partially Excluded Areas are included in other constituencies electing members without reservation. In Bombay there is one constituency of one set of Partially Excluded Areas with 2 seats, out of which 1 is reserved for Backward Tribes, and the other Partially Excluded Areas are included in general constituencies.⁶⁷ In the matter of representation there is no difference in principle between an Excluded Area and a Partially Excluded Area.

More than half the so-called aborigines of the Central Provinces⁶⁸ and about 60 per cent of the Bhils and others of the Bombay Presidency⁶⁹ are not included in the protected areas. But paragraph XV of the Instrument of Instructions to the Governor empowers him "if he thinks this course would enable him the better to discharge his duties to the inhabitants of those areas [Excluded or Partially Excluded] or to primitive sections of the population elsewhere," to appoint "an officer with the duty of bringing their needs to his notice and advising him regarding measures for their welfare." It is further stated therein that in the case of Excluded or Partially Excluded Areas he can do so in the exercise of the powers conferred upon him by law in relation to their administration, while in the case of the "primitive sections of population elsewhere" he

⁶⁷ N. Rajagopala Aiyangar, loc. cit., "The Government of India (Prov. Leg. Assemblies) Order," 1936.

⁶⁸ Elwin: "Loss of Nerve," p. 6.

⁶⁹ D. Symington: "Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in the Province of Bombay," p. 99.

can do so under powers in relation to "the discharge of his special responsibility for the safeguarding of the legitimate interests of minorities." Thus even the aborigines outside the Excluded or Partially Excluded Areas are tried to be protected from their countrymen, after having been allowed to remain in interaction with them without any such protection for more than seventy years, during which time, as we have seen, their interests have been safeguarded by some legislation which, in the opinion of many competent observers, has proved useful.

The method by which the problem of the so-called aborigines is attempted to be solved in the constitution leads one to the conclusion that the steps were taken not so much because all the aboriginals were really thought to be incapable of profiting by the parliamentary institutions of the constitution, nor even because they were unsympathetically treated by public bodies composed almost wholly of their non-aboriginal countrymen, but because the Parliament wanted to have the satisfaction of having done something to help the aborigines whom it had more or less neglected. In its eagerness to do something for the aborigines, it ignored relevant questions regarding the non-aboriginals in whose midst the protected aborigines live and on whom they depend to some extent for their livelihood. That these non-aboriginals, too, have rights, that their goodwill and co-operation, next only to the conscious and deliberate internal organization of the aborigines themselves, are the most essential factors for the present welfare and future development of the so-called aborigines, failed to receive adequate consideration.

To bring out the significance of these important aspects of the problem we may state here the percentages of the non-aboriginal population in many of the Partially Excluded Areas, comprised in the region we have principally taken up for discussion. To begin with the Santal Parganas, in 1901 the aborigines, including Hinduized Paharias, formed only 41.3 per cent of the population, and the semi-aborigines, including such castes as Chamar, Dosadh, etc., 20.5 per cent.⁷⁰ About 1930 the Santals, with other aboriginals and semi-Hinduized aborigines and low class Hindus, made up 51 per cent of the

70 "District Gazetteer of the Santal Parganas," p. 70.

whole population; but only 42 per cent spoke non-Aryan tongues.⁷¹ The fact that the Government of Bihar and Orissa grouped together not only the semi-Hinduized aborigines but even the low class Hindus with the aborigines to demarcate their percentage in the total population, coupled with the fact that such population formed one-third of the total aboriginal, semi-aboriginal, and low-caste Hindus in 1901, leads one to the inference that the really tribal population like the Santals cannot form more than 45 per cent of the total population of the district. In the Santal Parganas, then, the non-aboriginals, forming about 55 per cent of the population, are in a majority. In the Singhbhum district the aboriginals are in a strong majority, forming 76 per cent of the population of the whole district. But only a little over 56 per cent of the total population speak non-Aryan tongues. In Manbhum, on the other hand, they have only a slight majority, forming 52 per cent of the whole. But it must be remembered that the district is highly Aryanized, as only 14.5 per cent of the population still retain non-Aryan languages. In a later document, the Bihar and Orissa Government returned the percentage of the aboriginals in the district as 36 only.⁷² About the Palamau district, the Bihar and Orissa Government reports: "The proportion of its population returned as Animists is small, but the aboriginal and semi-aboriginal population which is Hindu in name is 49 per cent of the whole." Doubtless the case for the so-called aborigines in this district must be very weak. In the matter of retaining the tribal languages, it is the worst of all the districts of the Chota Nagpur Division, only 7 per cent of the population speaking non-Aryan tongues. The Ranchi district is the home of the so-called aborigines, who form nearly 80 per cent of the population. But only 53 per cent of the total population speak non-Aryan tongues, and 2,80,000 of the aboriginals are Christians. The case of the so-called aborigines is again very weak in the Hazaribagh district. The aboriginal and the semi-aboriginal people together form only 34 per cent of the whole population, about 8 per cent of the whole retaining their tribal languages.⁷³ In the Sambalpur district the

Govt. 71 "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. XII (Bihar and Orissa Memorandum), p. 336.

72 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1313.

73 "Report of the Indian Statutory Commission," Vol. XII, pp. 337-340.

Bihar and Orissa Government reported, in its memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission, that the aborigines formed 38 per cent of the population, while in its memorandum submitted to the Government of India, it put the percentage at 32.⁷⁴ According to the returns of the census of 1941 the tribal people are hardly 26 per cent of the Hindus of the district,⁷⁵ perhaps the lower percentage being due to the inclusion in the district, after the formation of the Orissa Province, of certain areas from the Bilaspur district. There is a good deal of confusion about the percentage of the aborigines in the Angul district, all of which is not explicable on the ground of inclusion or non-inclusion of Kondmals subdivision. Thus in its memorandum submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission, the Bihar and Orissa Government reported that in Angul the aboriginal tribes accounted for 74 per cent of the total population. The figures of the 1931 census given by the Orissa Committee,⁷⁶ return a percentage of about 33, if Angul and Kondmals are considered together. In Kondmals alone the percentage of the aborigines is 79, and that in Angul alone it is hardly 6. But the Bihar and Orissa Government returned the percentage of the aborigines in the Angul subdivision as 18.⁷⁷ According to the census figures of 1941, on the other hand, in Angul the aboriginal tribes are hardly one-eleventh of the Hindus.⁷⁸ In South Mirzapur, the tribes approximate 62 per cent of the total population.⁷⁹ Of the Bilaspur zamindaris, Pandaria has only 16.9 per cent aborigines, while Pendra and Kenda taken together show a percentage of 57. In the Baihar tahsil of the Balaghat district the aboriginals constitute 55.8 per cent of the total population. While in the Niwas and Dindori tahsils of the Mandla district aboriginals form 67.4 and 70.2 per cent of the population respectively, in the Mandla tahsil their percentage is 51.2. The aboriginals are in a majority in the Jagirdari estates of the Chindwara district, being 66.2 per cent of the population, though in the rest of the district they form only 32.1 per cent. In the Garchiroli tahsil

74 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1314.

75 "Census of India," 1941, Vol. XI (Tables: Orissa), p. 24.

76 "Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee, Orissa," pp. 246-47.

77 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1313.

78 "Orissa Tables," Census of India, 1941, p. 24.

79 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1175.

of the Chanda district they are in a decided minority, forming only 36.2 per cent of the whole population.⁸⁰ Out of the five partially Excluded Areas in the West Khandesh district, two, Nandurbar and Shahada, have a very small number of the "Bhils and allied castes." They form only 30.2 and 31.7 per cent of the population respectively. In the other three areas they are in a strong majority, ranging from over 75 to over 99 per cent. While in the Peint petha of the Nasik district the so-called aborigines constitute over 98 per cent of the population, in the Kalvan taluka their percentage is 48.8. In the Thana district, the Shahapur and Dahanu talukas have them as a minority, their percentages to the total population being 27.9 and 47.9. In the Umbergaon and Mokhada pethas they form 63.7 and 83.6 per cent of the total respectively.⁸¹

The non-aboriginal people, who, as is evident from the above statement, are found in fairly large numbers in many of the Partially Excluded Areas, some of which had never been marked out for special administrative treatment, did not find their place in these areas only as exploiters of the so-called aborigines. Quite often they were induced by the local chiefs to colonize those areas two or even three centuries earlier. We have seen that many landlords in the Mandla district got their lands from the local chiefs in the seventeenth century. Many of the non-aborigines of Chota Nagpur were invited by the local chiefs about the same time. The hill-chiefs, who are Uriyas, in the Madras tracts of the Konds, are generally the descendants of immigrants of nine or ten generations ago. They were either brought in originally to help the local zamindars to control the Konds, or they were invited by the Konds themselves to help them in their inter-tribal disputes.⁸² As already mentioned, in Kondmals the Koltas were introduced by the local chiefs to help them improve the local agricultural methods. Nay, even the British administrators, entrusted with the task of protective administration in some of the Scheduled Districts, found it desirable to induce some of the non-aborigines to settle in the areas under their charge in order to

80 *Ibid.*, pp. 1357, 1358, 1356, 1355, 1354.

81 "Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in the Province of Bombay," pp. 4, 53, 29.

82 "Manual of Administration of the Madras Presidency," Vol. I, pp. 73, 74.

develop the local resources. Dr. Majumdar observes about the presence of some of the non-aborigines amidst the Hos of Kolhan: "Though the Kolhan administration is responsible for the introduction of Dikkus [non-Hos] in Kolhan, they were allowed to settle because the need was obvious, and the Hos could not supply their needs by themselves." It was after Kolhan came directly under Government management that an agreement with the Hos to allow some of the non-Hos to settle in their midst was arrived at. The important role played by non-aborigines in the economy of Kolhan is thus described by Dr. Majumdar: "On the other hand, if the Dikkus [non-Hos] were not allowed to settle and tap the resources of the estate, it is indeed doubtful whether the Hos would have ever realized the possibilities of the land they live in."⁸³ Forsyth's concern over the large and valuable wastes of Mandla and the difficulties in the way of their exploitation, already referred to, makes very instructive reading in this connection.⁸⁴ One of the problems before the administrators in those days with regard to the development of certain tracts was that of procuring the proper type of labourers to settle therein. The Balaghat district of the Central Provinces was specially formed in order to induce certain classes of agriculturists to settle in the backward areas and thus to help in their development.⁸⁵

It must be borne in mind that many of the non-aboriginal people of some of the Partially Excluded Areas were deliberately introduced into those areas and have, during some fifty to two hundred years that they have been there, contributed to the economic development of the country and indirectly to some extent at least to the social development of the so-called aborigines. Because some of them took unfair advantage of the simplicity and ignorance of the aborigines it does not mean that their quota to the socio-economic development can be written off, much less can they be treated as a rightless population. We have already dealt with the history of the process. One can legitimately infer from it that in the process of the spoliation of the aborigines the administration must share the burden of the blame along with the non-ab-

83 "A Tribe in Transition," pp. 199, 8, 9.

84 "The Highlands of Central India," pp. 370-74.

85 "District Gazetteer of Balaghat," p. 56.

origines in so far as it did not awake to its responsibility in time, and when it did awake, it did not play its part with the thoroughness it required.

These non-aboriginal people are connected with similar people, who have been under normal administration and are now entitled to enjoy the fruits of political freedom, by trade and industry, and related to them by ties of marriage, family, and caste. When they see those under normal administration managing their affairs with the least interference from the executive, naturally they feel the difference of their status. The one outstanding feature of a Scheduled District or a Backward Tract has been the concentration of various functions, executive, judicial, revenue, in the head of the district. Political India has been demanding the utter separation of judicial from executive functions for the last many years. The population of a Scheduled District or a Backward Tract or even a Partially Excluded Area sees its possibility of being under an administration which is a total negation of one of the deeply cherished political reforms. Looking about for reasons, it finds them in their association with the so-called aborigines of the tracts. It is bound to nurse anger against the aborigines who thus appear to it in the role of a hindrance to its political advancement. The situation thus creates one source of irritation against the poor aborigine, who is sought to be helped, and whose welfare, to some extent at least, depends on his being placed in smooth and favourable relations with the very people in whom the irritation is likely to arise.

The policy of protecting the so-called aborigines through the constitutional expedient of an Excluded Area or a Partially Excluded Area evoked a protest from the politically conscious Indians and was strongly resented by many of them. It was resented as indicative of distrust in the political-minded classes upon whom the responsibility of Government was to devolve. Perhaps even deeper motives of a sinister nature were attributed. And here it must be borne in mind that the transference of an area to normal administration could be made only by Order in Council. The policy was interpreted as another manifestation of the desire to keep India divided within herself. Whatever may be the reasons which prompted the

Indian nationalists, they were thoroughly irritated by the policy. The situation brought about by the desire of the British Parliament to do something for the so-called aborigines, more or less neglected for long, at the eleventh hour was creating another source of irritation, not calculated to serve the best interests of the people sought to be protected. Fortunately events so evolved that the governing classes could and did show a very sympathetic attitude toward the protected people.

It is well known that in the Provinces where the Indian National Congress Party was in a strong majority, at the first elections to the Provincial Legislatures under the Government of India Act of 1935, a "gentlemen's agreement" was arrived at between the party leaders and the Governors of these Provinces, whereby a working compromise about special powers of the latter was achieved. The concord between the Governors and Ministers was so complete that the operation of the law respecting the Partially Excluded Areas in the five Provinces, important from the point of view of the so-called aborigines considered here, viz., Bihar, Orissa, the Central Provinces, Bombay, and Madras, may be said to have been in abeyance. This is the impression left upon us of the operation of the Act of 1935 during the short period that the Congress Party worked the reforms. That our impression is neither rare nor erroneous will be clear if one refers to the manner of appointment, the composition and the terms of reference of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee of Orissa. Though the Committee was formally appointed by the Governor, at its first meeting convened to discuss the draft questionnaire it was addressed by the then Prime Minister of Orissa, who "expressed the views of the Government on the scope of the enquiry."⁸⁶ Mr. Elwin, too, appears to have the same impression, as he tells his readers that "in 1939 the Congress Government gave orders that Baigas and other wild tribes should be allowed to carry their bows and arrows."⁸⁷ Strictly speaking the orders operative in Partially Excluded Areas are only those of the Governor. It was due to this happy circumstance of the virtual abeyance of the special powers of the

⁸⁶ "Report," pp. 1-4.

⁸⁷ "Loss of Nerve," p. 18.

Governor that the source of irritation lay dormant. But the potentialities are there.

The history of protection through the device of a Scheduled District and its later equivalent, that of a Backward-Tract, has made it more or less clear that the device is not such a panacea for the ills of the so-called aborigines that it should have been considered indispensable. The aborigines outside such protected tracts have not necessarily suffered greater or more persistent hardships than those within them. In a large number of cases the "unprotected" people have been placed under special laws, designed to safeguard their main economic interests, more or less similar to the laws in existence in Scheduled Districts or Backward Tracts, without appreciable difficulty having been felt either in enacting the legislation or applying it. Not infrequently we have come upon cases of groups of the so-called aborigines, living outside the Scheduled Districts or Backward Tracts, who have benefited by the situation and have been able for some time past to stand their ground against their non-aboriginal neighbours. There is enough evidence that in the case of others, who had not been able to adjust themselves to their surroundings through the unsupervised and uncontrolled social process, legislation protecting their economic interests was achieving the desired end of preventing their expropriation, besides treating them quite often on the same plane as their non-aboriginal agriculturist neighbours. Not only have the people in the Scheduled Districts or the Backward Tracts not derived greater advantages than the so-called aborigines outside them, but in a number of cases they have actually laboured under the old habits and customs which have proved disadvantageous to them and are likely to be more so for their future progress. The following remarks of a writer in *Nature*, reviewing a recent report on the administration of forests in Assam, admirably sum up the achievements of special administration: "The backward condition of these peoples must be attributed to the guiding rule of British administration that the customs of the people should not be interfered with, once tribal warfare and other practices incompatible with modern ideas had been stopped."⁸⁸

⁸⁸ "Nature," October 10, 1942 (Vol. 150), p. 440.

The special expedient for protection of the so-called aborigines, having so little to recommend it for its direct contribution to their present welfare and future progress, has the further disadvantage of antagonizing the non-aborigines with whom their welfare is intimately bound up. It is these people, or at least some of them, with whom their social and economic intercourse must sooner or later force the so-called aborigines to treat on terms of equality. Next to the deliberate organization of the so-called aborigines, the goodwill of these people is thus an important factor in their future progress. Given the conscious organized effort of the aborigines and the sympathy of the non-aborigines, we need not worry about their problems, present or future. On the other hand, with internal organization in a rudimentary stage, an atmosphere of antagonism or positive ill-will of the non-aborigines is bound to prove a great handicap to the welfare and progress of the so-called aborigines. Special constitutional arrangement to safeguard their interests not only does not achieve the larger purpose of assuring a proper future for the aborigines, but it militates against cordial relations between the United Kingdom and India. As explained above, Indian nationalists resent such arrangement and discover in it a device to keep the power of the British Government and of the British section of the Indian Services which they are reluctant to part with. When so much power was being transferred, it would have been ordinary good grace on the part of the British Parliament not to have insisted on a device of unproved utility as an eleventh-hour testimony of the realization of its responsibility. As later events have proved, even its efficacy is dubious, though its irritation-value is certain. Is it too late to mend?

CHAPTER VI

So-called Aborigines and Anthropologists

MANY of the so-called aboriginal peoples have been pronounced by almost all those who came into close contact with them as rather simple, truthful, honest, usually jovial and happy-go-lucky. They have hardly any thought of the morrow, and are therefore generally improvident. They have had their tribal social organization of a more or less patriarchal type, and some of them had retained it till their contact with the British. Even after the British contact, which rendered their contact with the Hindus more rapid and intensive, some of them have retained it, especially those who have been protected by the grant of Government through their old tribal organization. In the case of others, whether Hinduized or not, the organization itself has not completely disappeared, but has been lacking in that vitality and vigour which are characteristic of true tribal life. It lacks in operative force simply because it is shorn of its powers and sanctions by the administrative machinery of the British.

Most of these people practised a crude type of cultivation, known by various vernacular names, the essence of which was that it was shifting and required only spasmodic labour and care. Perhaps the Santals and the Oraons, who are not definitely known at the dawn of the British rule in India to have practised it, are the only tribes who might never have indulged in it. The Paharias, the Birhors, the Korwas, the Kharias, the Bhuiyas, the Konds, the Gonds, the Baigas, the Korkus, and the Bhils anciently carried on only the shifting kind of cultivation. The Paharias, the Birhors, the Korwas, and the Baigas even today hardly practise any plough-culture. The Kharias, the Bhuiyas, the Konds, the Gonds, and the Korkus, a large number of whose members have taken to plough-culture with greater or less success, have all of them a section generally known as the hill-section, which still depends on the old shifting type of cultivation for sustenance. The Mundas, per-

haps, practised shifting cultivation in the past, as their language is known not to possess many words connected with plough-culture. The shifting type of cultivation carried on by these tribes is of two slightly differing varieties. In one variety, fairly large trees and shrubs, preferably on the gentle slopes of the hills, are felled with axe in good time before the start of the monsoon, and the whole is fired and allowed to burn down into ashes. At the proper time in this ash-covered patch the people throw the desired seed, usually of a low-grade cereal, and depend upon nature to give a yield. They only take the trouble of putting up a crude watch-tower to keep watch over the depredations of animals and birds. In the other variety the main difference is that no trees are felled, but only branches of trees and shrubs are cut in abundance and spread on the selected patch and fired there. The rest is as in the first variety. It is evident that with such crude methods the yield is low and precarious. The people, therefore, depended on the forests and jungles, in more ways than one. They collected all kinds of edible roots and fruits, and freely hunted the game. They gathered all varieties of forest produce; straight poles from fair sized teak and other straight-growing trees, bamboos, honey, resin, lac, and silk cocoons. Neither in the process of felling trees, nor in that of cutting branches, nor again in the matter of collecting resin, lac, or silk cocoons, were they particular about the consequences of their present collection for their future. Forsyth graphically describes the wasteful ways of the so-called aborigines of the Central Indian Highland. A quotation or two from that description will give the reader a clear idea of the havoc wrought on the valuable forests. Forsyth observes: "With all his labour, however (and he works hard at this spasmodic sort of toil), he will not be able to work all the logs into position to get burnt; and at the end of a week, he will rest from his labour and contemplate with satisfaction the three or four acres of valuable teak forest he has reduced to a heap of ashes, strewn with the charred remains of the larger limbs and trunks." Writing about the methods of collecting forest produce, he says: "The Byga [Baiga] is the most terrible enemy to the forests we have anywhere in these hills. Thousands of

square miles of Sal forest have been clean destroyed by them in the progress of their cultivation. . . . In addition to this, the largest trees have everywhere been girdled by them to allow the gum resin of the Sal to exude." In the process of lac-collection "just as often as not the improvident wild man will cut down the whole tree to save himself the trouble of climbing."¹

They are all of them addicted to drink; formerly their own rice-beer or mahua-flower liquor, and latterly all kinds of liquor. As a race the Bhils, the Gonds, and others drink. Their women drink. And they accustom their children to it. Among most of them rice-beer is a necessary accompaniment of almost all social and religious functions.

Their simple nature and their unwillingness to remain at one place for long, whenever they cleared the jungle and settled there for some time, had facilitated their lands being acquired by the more clever, prudent, and thrifty Hindu cultivators. In some cases they had lost their lands as an incident of conquest. In other cases their chiefs, having adopted Hinduism, had brought in Hindu over-lords who, in their turn, had brought other Hindus and had slowly dispossessed or virtually expropriated a number of them. As the late Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy observed in regard to the Chota Nagpur Tribes, this process of spoliation had begun before the British domination in India, but it was really intensified with the introduction of the British system of law and revenue. The British introduced such a system of law and had such notions of land-tenures that it made possible for easy transfer of land. The system of law was complicated. The places of justice were far from the rayats' villages. The language used was sometimes entirely foreign and sometimes almost so to the aborigines. All this placed the aborigines at a disadvantage in a law-suit against a clever Hindu money-lender, land-holder, wine-dealer, or in fact against any man with some money and a fair amount of cunning. The land, it appears, came for the first time to be regarded as a transferable commodity. The rights of the original clearer of the land or his descendant could be extinguished to such an extent that he could be

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 96, 364, 367.

turned out of it, even though he had no other visible or ready source of employment except general labour. The process of accounting at all times appears mysterious to the uninitiated, and more so to the illiterate and much more so to the aborigines. Here was a bait to the clever and the cunning. And India, like the generality of mankind, had not and has not arrived at that stage of moral equilibrium wherein her sons would refuse to take the bait. And, in fact, the bait, unfortunately, appears to have been taken in by many. As a consequence land belonging to the aborigines began to pass into the hands of the money-lender, the absentee landlord, the non-cultivating owner, and the unsympathetic landlord. As we have seen, the British Government in India, as soon as its attention was drawn to the phenomenon by a violent outburst of burnings or killings, made some attempts at protecting the aborigines by enacting legislation to prevent such transactions taking place among those tribes which had roused the Government with their armed upheaval. Forest laws do not seem to have been framed to suit these tribes. The Paharias appear to be the only people who were early treated with consideration in regard to the forests. Later on the Baigas were assigned a special area for their shifting cultivation. The Birhors, the Korwas, and others were left to adjust themselves in the best way they could. The forest laws were very stringent, as the interests of revenue required them to be managed very efficiently. Excise laws, making it illegal to brew rice-beer or any kind of spirituous drink and offering ready-made highly intoxicating liquor, generally varied between the "central distillery" system and the "outstill" system without appreciably affecting the drink habits of these people.

We have seen how some of the older writers almost prophetically diagnosed some of the ills of these people, wrote books, and submitted memoranda on the conditions and the needs of these people. Almost without exception they spoke of the real hill-aborigine as a jolly though indolent, a likeable though shy, and a poorly fed though courageous, fellow. They contrasted the Hinduized section, the section that had settled down, which had the fullest benefit of the British system of law and revenue, which imbibed the liquor offered by the

British excise system and which had much less concern with the forest laws, as more steady in toil, better-fed, and yet untruthful and cringing. On the whole, they agreed that the place of the aborigines was with the plain-Hindus, shorn of the rot of land-grabbing of the latter. They were more or less sure that the hardy aborigines were not dwindling or showing any signs of moral or physical fatigue.

With justice it may be said that the eyes of anthropologists were turned to the discovery of evils attendant on the contact of aborigines with peoples of alien and higher culture by the writings of Rivers on the depopulation of Melanesia. Indian anthropologists proved no exception to this general rule. Writing about the Oraons in 1915, the late Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy remarked that Chota Nagpur had proved for the Oraons to be the area "originally of their consolidation and subsequently of disintegration and degradation," though he was very hopeful about the bright future that lay before them with the progress of education and the fostering care of the new provincial administration of Bihar and Orissa, under which they had been recently placed.² In 1929, Dr. D. N. Majumdar, while making a strong plea for some protection to the primitive tribes "in order to enable them to hold their own against the onslaught of foreign ideas," spoke of their "rapid disappearance" and of its possible cause as being "the change from the free and unfettered life of the jungle tribes to a so-called ordered existence or a life of degraded serfs" and the consequent "complete change in their mental attitude." After enumerating the factors that lead to the disappearance of primitive tribes under culture-contact, he instanced the Korwas and the Bihors of Chota Nagpur. He observed: "When a race or tribe cannot adapt itself to a changed environment, it is apparent that something is wrong in the process of adaptability."³ In a paper published in 1931 S. C. Roy dealt at length with the effects of culture-contact on the various aboriginal people of Chota Nagpur. We have made reference to it more than once and quoted some relevant passages in their proper context. On the whole he appraised the results

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 51, 207-209.

³ "Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal," N. S., Vol. XXV, pp. 150, 151, 155.

of the contact with Christianity as rather beneficial, and expected the people of Chota Nagpur ultimately to adopt and practise the three great principles of Hinduism, viz., true knowledge, true devotion, and right action. Of the British contact the consequences, according to him, have been very mixed. Some of the evil customs have been losing their hold on the people. But they have lost their lands and their rights in them largely due to the official apathy towards the peoples' inability to adjust themselves to a complicated system of law and revenue introduced among a backward people with different traditions and without proper education for its reception. The reactions of the three principal tribes to the spoliation of their ancient rights were different. Among the Mundas, whose faith in their old gods was shaken, a monotheistic movement of a militant type was promulgated by one Birsa and gathered great momentum for some time. The Oraons took to devotional singing and praying to God. A section of the Kharias moved into the neighbouring Feudatory states and another turned Christian. The Birhors and the Korwas, two tribes of Chota Nagpur which still live on shifting cultivation, have been utterly neglected by the special officers in charge of the tract. No area is reserved for them to practise their ancient occupation, nor has any attempt been made to induce them to take to plough-culture. It is in connection with the fate of these two tribes that Roy has thus remarked: "With the opening up of the country by roads and railways under British Rule and the gradual deforestation of the country and ever-increasing restrictions on the use of the forests, these forest tribes [Birhors and Korwas] are slowly but surely dying out, partly from famine and partly from *loss of interest in life*."⁴

The Census of India of 1931 was the first great occasion for the problems of the so-called aborigines to be placed pointedly before a much larger public than was the case with the efforts of earlier writers. The chorus of the main contributions of the Provincial Superintendents was that the tribal people badly needed protection. Dr. Hutton, the Commissioner of the Census, with his added authority, went a long way ahead of them all. Dr. Hutton thought that the changes

4 "Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society," 1931, pp. 375, 376-77, 362.

which were taking place in the so-called aboriginal society or societies of India for centuries before the British rule were slow, and therefore capable of gradual and proper adaptation. The development of communications led to a sudden increase of contacts, rendering the tempo of change too swift for the tribes to accommodate themselves to it properly. Efforts at developing the resources of the country occupied by them might lead to the acquiring of land and leasing it away for mining the minerals contained in it, and to "the introduction of an alien population, usually of an extremely mixed character and not infrequently exceptionally dissolute." They might result in the reservation of forests or in making some of the land available for intensive cultivation. Shifting cultivation, being wasteful of forest and jungle, might be and was prohibited in a number of cases. The introduction of a land-revenue code foreign to and ill-understood by these people might bring about loss of land and of other rights in land. He found that such fate had already befallen the Mundas. Law regarding debts might similarly lead to very unpleasant consequences to the tribalists in so far as their custom regarding debts blinds them to the implications of the new law. Excise laws, inasmuch as they prevent the people from distilling their usual drinks required in their religious practices, might be a hardship. The home-brewed drink was also a valuable part of their diet, a function which the spirituous liquor of the department cannot fulfil. The tribal customs might not be, and actually were not, properly understood in regard to marriage and inheritance. In the former case, it resulted in the tribalists being punished by the regular courts for doing what in reality the tribal customs not only allowed but considered quite proper. Inability to apply the tribal principles of inheritance and succession might hurt their sentiments. Even the well-meaning efforts of missionaries, he thought, produced as much evil as good. These are the anti-tribal forces, a combination of which "is likely to create a condition of excessive discomfort in tribal life, the most serious aspect of which is the complete breakdown of the communal organization." Only two reactions, he thought, were possible. The tribes might become Hinduized and settle down in

the Hindu fold as landless labourers and a depressed class, or in the alternative they might "retain a sort of emasculated tribal life, deprived of the customs and festivals that gave it meaning and cohesion, and fall into that psychological apathy and physical decline which has decimated so many tribal communities in the Pacific and elsewhere." Education, he considered "a doubtful blessing" though probably a necessary weapon of defence for them in the circumstances in which they are placed, perhaps the only one of any permanent value. "The solution of the problem," according to him, "would appear to be to create self-governing tribal areas with free power of self-determination in regard to surrounding or adjacent provincial units."⁵

Regarding the so-called aborigines of Bombay Presidency, where there was only a small area, the Mewasi estates, which were declared a Scheduled District and no Backward Tract, Mr. Dracup opined that though theoretically they should have benefited by the introduction of a settled form of Government brought in by the British, yet it was the experience of those who came in close contact with these people and administered for them the laws of this settled form of Government that the "flow of benefits" was not "quite so conspicuous." He pointed out in particular how the forest laws deprived these people of a substantial source of their income, how the game-laws deprived them of some food and turned a fair number of them into criminals. The excise laws meant to the aborigine "no more or less than a monstrous denial of privileges enjoyed for centuries and deprivation of rights which he cannot conceive to be equitable from any point of view."⁶

Mr. Shoobert struck a different and a discordant note, refreshing in its originality and its appreciation of reality. Though his remarks deserve to be quoted *in extenso*, we shall here reproduce only a few relevant sentences. He observed: "The results of the contact of races in the C. P. are not so obvious as in some other parts of the world or in some other parts of India—Assam for instance. Possibly, this is because different races have mingled together in the past, and different

⁵ "Census of India, 1931, India Report," pp. 504-507.

⁶ "Census of India, 1931, Bombay Report," pp. 382-383.

cultures have existed side by side for many centuries. . . . So far from the race dying out as has happened to the aborigines in other parts of the world, it has continued to form the most fecund element in the Provinces." Even more pointedly he distinguished between the effects of culture-contact in the Pacific and in India in the following words: "The devastating results of the activities of traders and mission-workers upon the ancient culture of the Pacific and elsewhere, which have recently occupied the attention of many distinguished ethnologists, have only a dim reflection in Central India. . . . It would not be fair in any way to draw a parallel between the condition of the aborigines of this Province and for example that of the disappearing tribes of the Pacific." He drew attention to some of the laws that pressed heavily on the aborigines. Owing to the excise laws they have to substitute distilled liquor for their rice-beer, which was a relatively harmless beverage. Opium and other drugs replace liquor on occasions. They have taken to clothes which they cannot afford in sufficient number to allow of change. In spite of the fact that the laws had caused inconvenience to the tribes, he admitted that it was the business of the civilized law to punish offences like human sacrifices and murders of wizards or witches, and that the principle was recognized by the aborigines even in the most remote corners. But the "prohibition of marriage by capture, shifting cultivation, and distillation of liquor" was not cheerfully accepted. Weighing the advantages and the disadvantages he observed: "It may be argued with considerable justification that the benefits bestowed upon the aborigines by the march of civilization more than balance the loss of many features in their own culture, and that the administration of an ordered Government is far more favourable to them than the autocratic rule of the chiefs and zamindars of the past and its attendant *begar* (forced labour) and oppression. There is, however, a very reasonable answer to such argument. The primitive tribes were allowed the freedom of the forest with little disturbance in the past; the system of *begar* was well suited to this Province until very recent times, and it has to be remembered that many of the most noble buildings in India, monuments of her ancient civilization,

were constructed almost entirely by this form of labour."⁷ Though he quoted with some approval passages from the notes supplied by Mr. Grigson regarding the conditions in Bastar State, yet, when quoting Mr. C. U. Wills' observations regarding the expropriation of the aborigines in the Bilaspur Zamin-dari estates, he remarked: "Mr. Wills was not opposed to the improvement of the aboriginal tribes by contacts with civilization, but only urged that they should be given breathing space and a fair opportunity of adapting themselves to new conditions. This is clear from what he wrote of the Kawars."⁸ We, on our part, may conclude that the final opinion of Mr. Shoobert, too, was that supervised contact with the surrounding peoples was the goal to be pursued for the welfare of the aborigines.

In 1935 the late Rai Bahadur S. C. Roy opined regarding the Hill Bhuiyas, that their increasing contact with other castes and tribes had widened their mental outlook and had removed certain old prejudices and fears. With all that, they had preserved much of their original simplicity, sense of self-respect, and independence of spirit, along with much of their traditional exuberance of life. He further contrasted the change in the outlook and living of the Hill Bhuiya with that of the Plains Bhuiya thus: "In this respect he compares favourably with the Plains Bhuiya in whose life some amount of complexity and artificiality appears to have impaired these old tribal characteristics." The contact of the Plains Bhuiya with neighbours of higher culture had not only led to "some economic and social progress," but also had "to some extent impaired his primitive virility and zest in life, though he no longer" appeared "to have any actual feeling of pessimism or social discomfort on that account."⁹

S. C. Roy and R. C. Roy, writing about the Kharias in 1937, observed that the improvement and progressive tendency in the life of the Dudh Kharias was the result of their contact with higher culture, both Hindu and Christian, and of the betterment of their social environment as well as of the conse-

⁷ "Census of India, 1931, C. P. and Berar Report," pp. 397-398, 400, 402.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

⁹ "The Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa," p. 318.

quent widened opportunities. They thought further that they were taking proper advantage of their contact with Hindus in various fields of life and were adopting and assimilating only such items of Hindu culture as could form integral parts of their tribal culture."¹⁰

In the same year Dr. D. N. Majumdar presented slightly conflicting observations and opinions regarding the position of the Hos of Kolhan in Singhbhum. He thought that the Ho he studied was not then "the same man as when he was found by the earlier administrative officers." The people appeared to him to be "a degenerate race of men, with weak constitutions, and a lower expectation of life in spite of the fact that they" were "multiplying faster than their ancestors." As to the causes of their supposed downfall he was not sure whether it was "excessive drinking" or "the limitation of their activities after the introduction of stringent forest rules" or "laziness and an absence of interest in life" or "a sudden change in their system of nutrition." He found that the health of the women in urban areas, where the reformist zeal of the Hos prohibiting their women from working in the bazaars was the strongest, as compared with that of their sisters in the interior jungly parts, was bad. He condemned that aspect of their reform movement which aimed at restricting the movements of their womenfolk. Yet about the menfolk and their idleness he wrote: "So long as it is not indispensable for the Ho men to work, so long as they depend upon the labours of their womenfolk, they prefer to remain idle and content with a hand-to-mouth existence." And one of the ways Ho males utilize their female-folk to maintain them is by sending "their wives and sisters to work in the mines, themselves remaining in the village." About the total situation his opinion was: "But it is a generally accepted fact that the moral deterioration of the Hos has kept pace with their physical degeneration, so that many would like to see the Hos in their former state of 'lawlessness' when they derived subsistence from the chase and the produce of the forest, supplemented by pillage or plunder." Nevertheless he summed up the position thus: "The factors that we have mentioned as exercising

¹⁰ "The Kharias," vol. II. pp. 526, 520.

tremendous influence on the life of the Hos have not given rise to any social disequilibrium. When a tribe is unable to adapt itself, a number of symptoms are manifest, such as indifference to the interests of the community to which the individual belongs, to the propagation of the family and descendants, a loss of alertness and virility, and a pessimistic outlook. These symptoms among the Hos have not assumed any great proportion. The external contact the Hos have established with the foreign elements in and outside Kolhan are slow and gradual, and that is how they have survived the ordeal and been adapted to the changed conditions of life. . . . Brought face to face with the forces of their new environment, they have learnt to respect them and get themselves adjusted. Their success in this respect, if success it may be called, may be traced to a number of more or less important elements in their culture."¹¹

In 1939 Mr. Elwin discussed in his monograph on the people the future of the Baigas. He thought that the Baigas could still be saved from the fate of the aboriginal peoples in other parts of India, which was brought upon them by an "over-hasty and unregulated process of 'uplift' and civilization." He quoted with approval the passage about "emasculated tribal life," which we have quoted above, from Dr. Hut-ton's writing in the census report of 1931, the observations of S. C. Roy about the Birhors and the Korwas, also mentioned above, and Mr. J. P. Mills' discussion about the evil effects of missionary activity in Assam. He noted the essential agreement in all the three pieces of writing and remarked: "It is this drabness and deadness that will destroy the tribesmen of India." Drawing attention to some of the movements among the Gonds he observed: "The life has gone from many villages. Child-marriages have started, untouchables are despised, in some villages the women have lost much of their freedom. . . . So far, nothing of this kind has happened to the Baiga, and even the supposedly reformed Binjhar tribe of Chhattisgarh are freer than the Gond. But the tendency is there." Contrasting the life in a jungle village where the Baigas still practise shifting cultivation with a village where

¹¹ "A Tribe in Transition," pp. 12, 13, 51, 14, 195.

they are in contact with the peoples of the plains, he found that in the former, tribal life had retained its vitality. Whereas in the former the people were happy and vigorous, in the latter they were timid and of poor physique. Tribal life and tradition had begun to appear ludicrous to the latter. "And once that point is reached, there is no hope for the tribe."

Diagnosing the malady in this way, he also suggested the remedy. "The first necessity is the establishment of a sort of National Park, in which not only the Baiga, but the thousands of simple Gond in their neighbourhood might take refuge." A fairly large area was to be marked out for this purpose. He found no use for the provision, made in the Government of India Act of 1935, for excluding wholly or partially certain areas from the direct operation of legislative control. He wanted the area to be under the "direct control of a Tribes' Commissioner," who, in all probability, was to be "an expert" standing "between them and the Legislature." The form of internal Government was to be the same as was resorted to in the case of the Hos and the Santals, viz., through the leaders or head-men of the tribe. The usual other steps, like licensing all non-aboriginals, were to be taken to safeguard the aboriginals from being exploited by unscrupulous adventurers. In short the administration was to be "so adjusted as to allow the tribesmen to live their lives with utmost possible happiness and freedom." "No missionaries of any religion" were to be allowed "to break up tribal life." In this manner everything possible was to be done "for a tribe's progress and advantage provided that the quality of tribal life is not impaired, that tribal culture is not destroyed, and that tribal freedom is restored or maintained." Perhaps their contacts with the outside world were to be reduced to the minimum. Special arrangements were to be made to market the Baiga produce. "If education is introduced, it should be on the lines of what is known at present as 'the Wardha Scheme,' simplified and adapted to the use of primitive people. . . . The old type of literary education, its regimentation, its exams, is useless to a tribe that will never be able to buy books or subscribe to newspapers." He pointed out how the Indian Penal Code needed some modifications in its application to ab-

originals. But the greatest need of the Baiga, according to him, was the restoration of the freedom of the forest, which "after all, did originally belong to him." The least freedom of the forest that should be restored to him was the permission for an annual hunt. Among other woes to which the Baigas are heirs is the tyranny of petty officials, who do not mind confiscating the fish caught by the poor Baigas, evidently under the pretext of restoring the law and order. Perhaps one of the major ills is the forced labour extorted out of the Baigas and others, *begar* as it is called. "*Begar* is the curse of tribal India." Last, though the most urgent, need of the Baigas is a more liberal policy with regard to "bewar" or shifting cultivation, described above. "Wherever bewar is permitted you will find the old culture vital and energetic; where it has been stopped, the Baigas have sunk down to the dead level of futility, mediocrity, and apathy of the rest of village India." And all this is to be done to save the Baigas from the fate which has overtaken many an aboriginal as stated at the very beginning of this summary of Mr. Elwin's diagnosis and treatment of the social diseases of the aboriginals. Yet for the sake of emphasis and clarity it may be reiterated here in his own words: "They will sink from their proud office of lords of the jungle to the very bottom of the social scale; half-way between civilization and an emasculated tribal life, they will practise the worst features of both. This gloomy future could be averted by the creation of the National Park that I have suggested or at least by the handing over to the Baiga part of the great tracts of forest that can never be exploited commercially."¹²

About the same time Dr. D. N. Majumdar, in his paper entitled "Primitive Society and Its Discomforts," read before the 2nd All India Population Conference, opined that "large number of tribes" showed "a decline or a tendency to decline." About the Korwas, whom he specially studied, he observed that "the disparity in the proportion of sexes, imported diseases, loss of ambition in life and similar factors" were "leading to a depopulation in their ranks." He discovered among them the mental background which led to this vital decline and considered it to be more or less common to the so-

12 "The Baiga," pp. 511-519.

called aboriginal tribes of India. "They are indifferent to their own welfare, improvident, and are unmindful of the health of their progeny." The direct cause of this apathy and decline, he detected in the changed social and economic conditions. "The life and death struggle of many primitive tribes in India and elsewhere in consequence of adverse economic conditions had led to a moral depression, and its effects have been disastrous on the vitality of the tribal stock." This was the "toll" of the "discomforts" and "miseries," eleven of which he enumerated: (1) The excise laws have hit them hard. "The outstill-system" had "led to an increase in drunkenness and immorality." (2) The displacement of tribal officers by those of the administration has "disorganised tribal life in all its aspects." (3) Tribal land used for shifting cultivation has been taken away from them. (4) Quarrying in the land owned is not allowed except with the payment of heavy licence fees. (5) Shifting cultivation is prohibited in most areas. The people, thus, have been forced to take to the kind of agriculture "unsuited to them or for which they do not know adequate offering and sacrifices which will please the gods presiding over agriculture." (6) Marriage by capture has been treated as an offence under the Indian Penal Code. It was generally resorted to in order to avoid payment of heavy bride-price, and the substitute had worked smoothly. The consequences of the situation created by the intrusion of the Indian Penal Code in this aspect of tribal life he characterized in the following words: "The recognition of this custom as offence punishable by law will seriously undermine social solidarity and lead to racial dysgenics. Already we know that late marriage is customary among the tribal people, and there are a large number of men and women in every tribe who cannot afford to marry under normal conditions." (7) The fairs and weekly markets which have begun to attract these people are ruining them financially. (8) Education which has been and is being imparted has been "more harmful than otherwise." (9) The judicial officers, not being conversant with "the dialects, customs, and mentality of the people," have not been able to give them satisfactory justice. (10) Missionary effort has resulted in creating in their minds a loathing

for their own culture and a longing for things which they have not the means to satisfy. (11) Contact has introduced diseases in tribal peoples for which "they possess no efficient indigenous pharmacopœa." Medical help rendered by the state is meagre.¹³

In 1941 Mr. A. V. Thakkar, one of the well-known "Servants" of India, took for his R. R. Kale memorial lecture the theme of the problem of aborigines in India. His angle of vision being that of a purely social worker, he started by stating that the aborigines, or the *adivasis* as he called them, had been neglected by all the rulers that enjoyed dominion over this vast country. He found them the poorest section of the Indian population, remaining in "almost pre-historic civilization." In the straight manner of a social worker he observed: "The problem of the aborigines may be analyzed into (1) Poverty, (2) Illiteracy, (3) Ill-health, (4) Inaccessibility of the areas inhabited by tribals, (5) Defects in administration, and (6) Lack of leadership." While discussing the poverty of these people he remarked that the aboriginal is "proverbially lazy," and the type of cultivation, viz., shifting cultivation, encourages his laziness. He stated it as his opinion that the aboriginal's interest in plough-cultivation could be aroused, and he could be made to stick to it. As other causes of the aboriginal's poverty he mentioned forced labour for zamindars and drink-habits of the people. He advocated the spread of the usual type of education in all its stages and also of vocational education, the latter through residential schools conveniently scattered over the aboriginal tract. The diseases which are rampant among these people are mainly malaria, yaws, and venereal diseases. He would like to extend the facilities of modern medical science to them through itinerant social workers. He was quite aware of the obstacles in the way of applying the treatment, leaving aside the cost of it to the philanthropic organization or the state, in the form of their superstitious ideas. He asked the social worker to use persuasion and patient propaganda. Not believing the outside contact to be dangerous to the people, he insisted upon open-

¹³ "Indian Population Problems" (Report and Proceedings of the 2nd All India Population and 1st Family Hygiene Conference), pp. SA 64, 65, 71, 69, 70.

ing up their country by means of good roads. He thought that the tribalists, whose country is generally rich in minerals and other natural resources, should profit by the ease of communication. Trade and industry would develop. The aboriginal would be economically better off, and, socially, contact with the advanced people of the plains would profit him. It is clear from what he said regarding the aborigines of C. P. and Bihar, who were working in mines or in tea-gardens, that these results he expected only in the event of the curtailment of the drink-evil among them. He agreed with S. C. Roy's opinion that the British system of law and administration had proved disastrous to the aborigines. He also accepted Mr. Grigson's observations about the difficulty experienced by them in getting justice owing to the delay involved in the process. He thought that one of the reasons for justice being denied to these people is the fact of its being administered by executive officers, "who are overburdened with executive functions and whose legal knowledge cannot be of a very high standard if not altogether questionable." The proper remedy, according to him, lay in the appointment of special judges, who are conversant with tribal law and custom. Tribal panchayats must be encouraged to function within certain limits. It would appear that he wanted the representation of these peoples to be much larger in the Provincial Legislatures by means of reservation in general electorates, and definitely so in the local bodies. He declared himself emphatically against the constitutional device of either completely or partially excluding these areas. Administration under this device, according to him, was "highly authoritative and autocratic." Besides, one and the same officer had so many functions to discharge that efficient administration was well-nigh impossible. There was no attempt, worth naming, even at real local self-government. Among the non-Christian aborigines there are very few men who can and do assume the role of leaders. In his opinion this was the opportunity for social workers to espouse their cause as long as they cannot turn out sufficient number of people to discharge their duties as leaders.

Discussing the nature of the policies put forward for the welfare of the aborigines, he divided them into two schools

of thought. "Isolationism" was generally sponsored by anthropologists and the "British members of the I. C. S. and other Government officers." It aimed at "keeping the aborigines in their areas untouched by the civilization of the plains." The argument advanced by the sponsors of this policy was that contact with the Hindus would break the solidarity of tribal society and would introduce the social evils of untouchability, early marriage, and purdah into it. They thought that even the activities of Indian social workers would, or actually had, spread these evils among them. As typical of this view he quoted some short passages from Dr. Hutton's writing on the subject in the census report of 1931. He himself found no reason to believe that only the bad customs of the Hindus and Muslims would be imitated by the aborigines, or that social workers would or could countenance them. Safeguards like the laws regarding non-alienation of land could be instituted to protect them from the evil effects of the contact. Unless the aborigines realized, through their contact with more advanced people, their own backwardness in the economic, social, and political fields, they could not make any progress. He appreciated the services, past and future, of anthropologists to the cause of the aborigines; but he could not understand why they advocated their isolation. He could only attribute this attitude to the academic interest of anthropologists. "But to keep these people confined to and isolated in their inaccessible hills and jungles is something like keeping them in glass cases of a museum for the curiosity of purely academic persons." Working under this belief he assured anthropologists that even without this expedient they would find plenty of work in investigating aboriginal life. He accused the "isolationists" as a whole of not only not objecting to the "Christian missionaries' close and uncontrolled contact with them," but even of actively encouraging the spread of Christian propaganda and Roman script for tribal dialects. "Isolationists" characterized "indigenous social workers and nationalist politicians" as "interventionists." He objected to the term "interventionist," and pleaded that the policy advocated by Indian social workers and nationalist politicians was one of "*Assimilation*." "The aborigines should form part of the civilized

communities of our country not for the purpose of swelling the figures of the followers of this religion or that, but to share with the advanced communities the privileges and duties on equal terms in the general social and political life of the country. Separatism and isolation seem to be dangerous theories, and they strike at the root of national solidarity."¹⁴

In the same year as that of Mr. Thakkar's lecture, was published O'Malley's "Modern India and the West," in which Dr. Hutton contributed an article on Primitive Tribes, forming chapter XII of the book. He was there mainly concerned with the effects of British rule on the Primitive tribes which had till then survived as tribal entities, and their contact through it with the outside world. His general conclusion was thus stated:¹⁵ "Far from being of immediate benefit to the primitive tribes, the establishment of British rule in India did most of them much more harm than good. . . . It may be said that the early days of British administration did very great detriment to the economic position of tribes through ignorance and neglect of their rights and customs. The wrongs done to them in this way have sometimes been little less than those done to them in the pre-British days of conquest and dispossession, such as the Bhar tribe must have experienced in Bihar or the Kurumba in the Deccan. Subsequently, a period of greater understanding led to many attempts to protect and preserve the tribes, and though in many cases these may have come too late to do all they should, in some, at any rate, they have at least prevented the degradation of primitive tribes to the status of outcaste, gipsy, or scavenger, which has been the fate of so many in the more distant past. Meanwhile many changes have been caused incidentally by the penetration of tribal country, the opening up of communications, the protection of forests, and the establishment of schools, to say nothing of the openings given in this way to Christian missions. Many of the results of these changes have caused acute discomfort to the tribes." This acuteness of discomfort was very often so great that it led to apathy, indifference, moral deterioration, and even a decline in population. On the other hand, to the

¹⁴ "The Problem of Aborigines in India," pp. 7-9, 12, 13, 16-19, 20, 21-26.
¹⁵ Loc. cit., pp. 417, 438.

credit of British rule must be put down certain gains. Most cruel tribal customs were put down, and warfare was stopped. Modern medicine was applied and infant mortality curtailed. The arts of reading and writing were spread, and easier intercourse and communication placed at their disposal through roads and post-offices. The ills to which primitives were exposed came from two slightly different aspects of British rule: (1) introduction of an administrative system which failed to take account of any special needs; and (2) deliberate measures intended to ameliorate the condition of these tribes. Three major evils proceeded from these sources, viz., (i) loss of land to and supplanting of the tribal village headmen by foreigners, particularly the Hindus from the plains, whether cultivators, money-lenders, traders, or mere land-grabbers; (ii) loss of means of subsistence and other evils; and (iii) disintegration of tribal solidarity.¹⁶

The first process he illustrated by the example of the Mundas and the Santals, that of the Mal Paharias serving as a contrast. We have already described the processes as they were working among these tribes and others, and we need not repeat here Dr. Hutton's account, which is more or less similar, being based on identical authorities.¹⁷ Forest conservancy laws curtailed the activities of these tribes in the matter of procuring food supply from the forests, and led to the stoppage, in many cases, of the one form of cultivation with which they were familiar, viz., the shifting type. Many a time prohibition of shifting cultivation was not accompanied by any attempt to introduce these people to plough-cultivation by supplying them ploughs and bullocks. Excise policy and laws deprived them of a valuable source of dietary requirements and made them more drunk. In one case at least, that of the Gonds, the prohibition of distilling liquor entailed a hardship in the matter of religious belief and practice. Their forests have come to be exploited for their mineral and other resources. This exploitation has meant loss of land, but it has also placed at their disposal better money-wages. But the cash which they receive as wages "is often an inadequate recompense for

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 435, 429-30, 430-432, 433, 434, 438, 441, 442.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 419-429.

the loss of lands and independence." All this has brought in its train the tyranny of a large number of petty officers. In the forest villages the officers can legally force the people to do some of the required labour for them at a nominal wage, which is not always paid. Forced labour was the direct consequence of forest development.¹⁸ Where the process of settling the foreigner in the midst of aborigines set in, owing to lack of protection, break-up of tribal solidarity and the disintegration of the village community followed as a natural consequence. Provision of criminal courts and the application of the Indian Penal Code encouraged anti-social individuals to set at naught the tribal authority. The tribal hunt became a thing of the past. Thus vanished one of the important occasions of the test of tribal solidarity. Cash-nexus of the newly introduced money-economy led to moral deterioration and to the disregard of the tribal virtues of hardihood and hospitality. While the introduction of British system of law and administration thus undermined tribal solidarity indirectly, active pursuance of policy tended to the same end. With a view to settle the Baigas in the reservation in Mandla marked off for them, the Gonds were settled amidst them so that the tribal life of the Baigas could be broken and they could be persuaded to take to plough-cultivation. The work of Christian missions among the aboriginal tribes was largely the direct result of the penetration of their country by the British, and their work was largely inimical to tribal life. "The missionary, too, has contributed to this, and although he has often much to give in exchange which has not been without its material and economic value to the primitive tribes, his influence has certainly tended to destroy the social unity of the whole. . . . In Chota Nagpur, Catholic converts have been forbidden to join tribal movements independent of religious belief but aimed at the social uplift of the tribe as a whole, whether Christian or pagan." Change of faith resulting from missionary effort led to the "abandonment of art in wood-carving, dancing, song and ornament." In the Assam Hills, Christianity was opposed to the institution of the Bachelors' House. All this promoted "the disintegration of the vil-

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 430-432, 433, 435, 436.

lage community and the sacrifice of communal to personal interests."¹⁹

While the policy of making the sale of liquor a monopoly and a source of revenue to the state had extremely mischievous results for primitive tribes, the policy of total prohibition; advocated by the members of the Indian public, is very likely to cause a tyrannical interference with their private life.²⁰

In the matter of tribal languages the effects of British rule were double-edged. Improved communications made it possible for Indo-Aryan languages to penetrate to some of the areas where they were formerly not known. On the other hand, the starting of schools for imparting rudiments of reading and writing, which could be done only through the mother-tongue, had necessitated the use of a script for these languages which had never had a script. Missionaries, too, needed a script for these languages to take the gospel of the Scriptures to the people. "The general result of this is likely to help to perpetuate the tribal language, and so to counter-balance to some extent the speeding up of the process of assimilation."²¹

As regards religion, British connection had affected the people adversely. The change-over to Hinduism was an old phenomenon, which was only hastened by the British penetration into tribal strongholds. Defection to Christianity was largely the direct result of this penetration.²²

This summary of Dr. Hutton's views, expressed in 1941, would be incomplete without some of his remarks about minor changes that had come about or were occurring in tribal life as an indirect result of the change in Indian life brought about by British rule. Thus he observed that new wants, such as tailored clothes, lamps, bicycles, and sewing-machines, had appeared in tribal life, and they were fast tending to be necessities. The consequences of this phenomenon are best described in his own language. "Money is needed to buy these gadgets, and the way of living must be changed to earn it. And herein lies one of the most serious of these

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 430, 434, 438, 442, 431, 437, 441.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 433.

²¹ Ibid., p. 437.

²² Ibid.

changes, and that is the change in values." Perhaps urged by such wants, persons of enterprise and grit left their tribal villages in search of work and earned some money and returned to their villages only to flaunt their wealth in the eyes of their fellows and to deride their tribal elders. The elders in their turn were "only too likely to sacrifice their own tribal standards and prejudice the interests of their fellow villagers in the attempt to obtain this new source of power for themselves."²³

Dr. Hutton's presentation of woes and ills of primitive tribes due to their contact with British administration and the opening of their country consequent on it, would lead one to think that they are an effete people incapable of producing leaders to manage their affairs properly. Dr. Hutton has dispelled this impression. The plight, which his analysis reveals, was the peculiar fate of those tribes which had not the good luck of being given special protection like some others. The inhabitants of the Khasi States in Assam, on the other hand, who were specially favoured from the very beginning of their connection with the British, stood in complete contrast with others whose fate was discussed so far. The cases of the Mal Paharias, of the Santals, and of the peoples of the Lushai Hills in Assam were more or less similar to that of the Khasi tribes. Even in the Naga Hills, where feuds between villages were acute, "the policy of segregation, and of administration largely by tribal custom" had "worked wonders." In Chota Nagpur, another specially administered region, the hill tribes showed that they were not "without capacity to manage their own affairs no less efficiently than the people of the plains districts, and to produce, like the tribesmen of the Assam hills, the necessary number of doctors, teachers, and so forth, to fulfil the needs of their own tribesmen." However, the capacity was not well developed so far, and all of them required "a measure of protection to allow it to grow without subjection to the more fully developed political sense of Hindu and Muslim neighbours." "Indeed, it is only by giving them protection that the Hill tribes will have the opportunity to grow at all." He was, therefore, sorry that the protection given to the "partially excluded

²³ Ibid., pp. 439-440.

areas" under the Government of India Act of 1935 was "dangerously impaired by substituting ministerial control for that of the Governor," because he thought that owing to the Ministers' control over these backward areas they were "liable to be used as pawns in the political game." Needless to say, under the circumstances the best interests of tribal people might not be the sole guide to decisions regarding matters in their areas. He was even more sorry to find that "many of the smaller tribes all over India" who were "most in need of protection and least able to stand on their feet" were, "owing to their geographical and social environment, deprived even of that measure of protection." The reason for these feelings may be stated in his own words: "For it is not beyond the power of India's primitive tribes, if properly treated, to stand on their own feet, control their own affairs, and contribute their own quota of original and individual genius to the national life of India."²⁴

O'Malley, the editor of the book, in his general survey of the problem endorsed the findings of Dr. Hutton to a large extent. He thought that the history of these people during their British contact was "a somewhat distressing record of the effects of an alien civilization impinging on simple and backward peoples." But he dwelt much more prominently on the extenuating circumstances or considerations. In the distress caused, "the chief villain of the piece has been the Indian rather than the European." Though the administrative machinery was framed without reference to special interests, and through its operation certain distress was caused to the primitive tribes, yet "honest and conscientious efforts were made to remedy mistakes when they were realized and to adjust the system to their circumstances." He ended his appraisal of the effects of the British rule on them in these words: "It must at any rate be put down to its credit that it recognized its responsibility for their welfare and constituted itself their guardian, and on the transfer of power to Governments responsible not to the British Parliament but to elected representatives of the Indian people, it took measures to secure the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 442-444.

continuance of its policy by conferring on Governors of provinces a special responsibility for their protection and by constituting, for the larger tribes at least, areas in which a simpler form of administration more suited to their needs is in force."²⁵

About the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942 Mr. Verrier Elwin published a brochure entitled "Loss of Nerve," in which he expanded the views he had previously expressed in his book, "The Baiga," both as regards argument as well as their validity as applied to other tribes of the C. P. He divided the aborigines into three classes. The first class, represented by Gond aristocracy, Binjhar landlords, and Korku noblemen, and a number of ordinary tribesmen, mostly Gonds, had solved its problem by acquiring a respectable status in Hindu society with commensurate economic stability. The second class consisted of the so-called Hinduized sections of the aborigines, the third class being formed by those tribes and tribesmen who had still kept up a vigorous tribal life mostly in the remote recesses of forests and on the heights of hills. Members of the second class, according to him, were "suffering from a sense of frustration and dismay, a certain loss of nerve." And his aim in the said brochure was "to discover why it is that the second class has suffered moral depression and decay as a result of contacts from which the third class has largely been free." Causes of this depression he thought were: (i) loss of land; (ii) loss of the freedom of the forest; (iii) disappearance of the ritual hunt; (iv) economic impoverishment; (v) collapse of tribal industries and frustration of the creative impulse; (vi) nervous and moral exhaustion from contact with the law; (vii) suppression of the home distillery; (viii) an unregulated system of education; (ix) external contacts of tribal religion and (x) organized movements of reform.*

Under the cause, "loss of land," he pointed out the expropriation of the Gonds and the Korkus through the usual channel of the money-lender. "The actual loss of land lowers the aboriginal's prestige and his self-confidence." Though he

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 737, 738.

* The order in which the causes are enumerated here is slightly different from Mr. Elwin's.

quoted Mr. Lillie's remarks about the good effect of the Land Alienation Act passed about twenty-five years before, he opined that "even where the land is retained, the new regulations governing its possession, so different from the casual and communal laws of the tribe, disturb the whole theory of ownership, use, and transfer."²⁶ The second cause of depression—loss of the freedom of the forest—he illustrated with the help of forest conservancy with its attendant prohibition of shifting cultivation and the attempts of the Government of the Central Provinces to settle the Baigas as plough-cultivators. The Baigas, believing that ploughing was lacerating the breasts of Mother Earth, thought that they had incurred the displeasure of God by their plough-cultivation. Their uneasiness over it resulted in moral depression. Disappearance of the ritual hunt, though listed as a separate cause, was really the result of the same forest policy which led to the curtailment of unbounded rights in the forest. Stoppage of the ritual hunt was a great psychological and even material impoverishment to the Gonds and the Baigas.²⁷ Similarly the next cause—economic impoverishment—is only a combined result of all the preceding causes. Under it he mentioned forced labour and the dishonest dealings of merchants and money-lenders as principal factors. He characterized both kinds of forced labour in the following words: "The most obvious and most disgraceful form of this exploitation is the extortion of free labour and free supplies by landlords, contractors, and subordinate officials. *Begar* (compulsory unpaid labour) is the curse of tribal India." Dealings with merchants and money-lenders, added to the uncertainty involved in forced labour, created "a psychology of fear in the tribesmen's mind, the sense that every man's hand is against him."²⁸ The collapse of tribal industries was due to two causes. The universal tendency to caste monopolies in the matter of the practice of crafts must have led to the separation from the main body of sections of the tribe which had carried on the specialized crafts and to their absorption into Hindu society as castes. This process left the main body of the tribe thoroughly im-

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31.

poverished. Secondly, urban and foreign competition told heavily on the crafts which had still continued to be practised by tribes either for their domestic use or for the use of their immediate neighbours. The extinction of arts and crafts impaired the aesthetic sense of the people, killing their delight in the exercise of the creative impulse.²⁹ Under the heading of moral exhaustion caused by contact with the law, he described, more or less, what others have pointed out, viz., the delay, lack of understanding of the complex procedure, application of the Penal Code, non-comprehension of their tribal customs in the matter of civil law, etc. Suppression of the home-distillery is the direct result of one of the laws of that system which accounted for the last cause of depression. The excise policy naturally put a stop to the home-distillery. In this connection, his opinions deserve being quoted here: "But for the aboriginal in the Central Provinces, except in certain obvious cases, liquor is not a source of degradation or disease. . . . The real evil of liquor to the aboriginal is not that it makes him drunk, but that it brings him into contact with, and often makes him dependent on, a degraded type of alien."³⁰ By unregulated education he largely meant the kind of primary education, then given by the kind of caste-ridden teachers then employed. One result of that education was, according to him, the spread of the idea of untouchability and other evil practices prevalent among unregenerate Hindus. The other was the lack of emotional appeal, as the teaching was done through the medium of Hindi with books written in it. He said: "The boys are taught in a foreign language (Hindi), and with the destruction of their own tongues a whole world of poetry and legend disappears. The aesthetic effect of education is disastrous." Yet he thought that education, very probably of the type he advocated, was a necessity for this class of aboriginals. The education which he would like to see imparted to them should be such as would tend "to conserve and develop aboriginal culture, religion and tribal institutions," would equip the people to defend themselves against bad influences of alien cultures, and would im-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-34.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

prove their economic condition. We have already summarized and controverted his views on the impact of Hindu religion and culture on those of the so-called aborigines in another connection. His condemnation of uplift movements among the tribalists also has been partly mentioned, and his fears have been shown to be baseless. Here we should like to emphasize how strong his opposition to these movements was. As to their total effect he observed: "They stimulate the spirit of communalism, arrogance, and caste exclusiveness; and in the long run they destroy tribal religion, art, and organization."³¹

Regarding the third class of the so-called aborigines, those that have still kept up their tribal solidarity, he thought that they were in a healthy and more or less vigorous condition, with their tribal life still alive. They were apparently not suffering from loss of nerve. And a fate similar to that of the second class could be prevented from overtaking them. For them, perhaps, the proposals he put forward in his previous work were to be applied. Even education for them was harmful at their stage. Administration on the Bastar pattern was to be their salvation.³²

The most important principle in the treatment of the so-called aborigines was that "economic improvement should precede any schemes of reform, education, or political representation." For, in his opinion, "political and administrative questions have little effect on the aboriginal." Discussing the constitutional provision made in the Government of India Act of 1935 and the Order in Council issued in pursuance of it, he observed: "The order-in-Council . . . did not declare any district as totally excluded in the Central Provinces and Berar. But a number of areas were partially excluded. . . . Even so, less than half the aborigines in the Province live within these protected areas." Referring to the suggestion, made by the Government of India to ease the feelings of the House of Commons, that wherever the aborigines were in sufficiently large numbers a special officer, who should be an adviser to the Governor, should be appointed, he said: "This question, so vital, so essential to the welfare of the tribesmen, was not ac-

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-29, 50, 27, 43-44.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 50, 9.

cepted with any great enthusiasm by the Provincial Governments." The expedient of reservation of aboriginal areas caused the worst possible impression in India, particularly among the Congress-minded people. "The actual result, therefore, of this admirably intentioned move for the protection of the tribesmen has probably been to destroy any real chance of protecting them at all." He approved of the belief of a former Administrator of Bastar that "the model for a largely aboriginal State like Bastar should be the principle of indirect rule associated in Nigeria with the name of Lugard and in Tanganyika with that of Cameron." Nevertheless, he proclaimed himself to be "not one of those who advocate a policy of absolute isolation."³³

Mr. Thakkar's treatment of the question is essentially a political reaction of a social worker, tending to present the problem in an over-simplified form. It will be seen from the account of the views of various anthropologists and administrators presented above that he has failed to do justice both to the anthropologists and the British members of the administration. The late Rai Bahadur S. C. Roy, the first Indian anthropologist of note, was evidently an "assimilationist." He pointed out the good that was done to the so-called aborigines by their contact with the Hindus in spite of the bad effects it produced, and hoped for a brighter future for them in the assimilative process. He even opined, a few years after "acute discomfort," "psychical apathy," and "physical decline" were discovered among the tribes by Dr. Hutton, that the tribes which had come under his observation did not show these symptoms in any marked manner. British administrators, like Mr. Wills, Mr. Starte, and Mr. Shoober, could not be considered to have been "isolationists." They saw clearly that the future of the so-called aborigines was with the Hindus of the plains. Only, they considered it necessary, in order that the goal might be adequately achieved, that there should be protection for some time in the interests of the tribalists.

His accusation that the isolationists not only view with unconcern but also actively support the missionary penetration of the tribal tracts, is not true. Dr. Hutton, as should

33 Ibid., pp. 50, 8, 5, 6, 8, 9.

be clear to one who has read the few quotations from his writings given above, is bitter against the evil influence of the missionaries. Mr. Elwin appears to be even more so than most others. Both Roy and Dr. Hutton no doubt pay tributes to the fine work done by the missions. Roy was almost grateful to them for the educational benefits they conferred on the tribes of Chota Nagpur. He could not be oblivious to the fact that the missionaries helped to raise the mental and moral stature of the tribalists that came under their influence. Nor can a dispassionate study of the efforts made by the missionaries to impart education, even vocational education, to the Hos and other tribes of Chota Nagpur fail to impress one with the zeal of the missionaries and the good they brought to the tribes. Because an Indian nationalist sees in the Christianizing process the sowing of the seeds of separatism, or because an anthropologist finds it detrimental to tribal solidarity, it does not mean that the missions brought no comfort, no means of advance to the aborigines themselves. The value of the missionary effort for the betterment of the tribes should be frankly and warmly appreciated, particularly so by one who believes that their future lies in assimilation and not isolation. If the Hindus or the nationalists realize the dangers of Christian missionary enterprise among the so-called aborigines, they should start their own benevolent activities which the missions carry on, and thus give a concrete lesson of their active sympathy for the tribes and nullify the feared evil effects of the missionary activity. The task should be easier for them than for the missionaries. They do not have to proselytize, as the tribalists have already much in common with their faiths. The missionaries, on the other hand, would be faced with a difficulty. There is no doubt that to get the necessary money for such work from their organizations the missionary workers have to produce proofs of the spread of the Christian gospel. They have therefore to carry on their proselytizing among the tribalists while they administer to their needs by providing medicine, education, and other facilities. The tribalists getting all the benefits, which they derive from the activities of the missionaries, from the Hindus, and the nationalists working amidst them, should hardly think of approaching the missions for

such help. The tribalists, who should turn Christian, even when it is not necessary for them to take recourse to the mission institutions for help, must be considered to be those who really desire a change of faith, which, under the circumstances, is bound to do good to them. Nobody should quarrel about such a change of faith. So long as such benevolent work is not conducted on a large scale by the Hindus and the nationalists among the so-called aborigines, to express strong dislike of the missionary activity of the Christian church only shows their weakness, narrow-mindedness, and imperfect appreciation of the problem of the aborigines. Mr. Thakkar's accusation that the isolationists have not criticized Christian missions in their enterprise among the aborigines does not stand to reason. They have presented the case as it really is. The missions have done some real good to the tribalists, but they have also done them harm. Mr. Elwin, in his work on the Baiga, quoted with approval Mr. Mills' observations about the evil effects of "a narrow Christian missionary policy." In his "National Park" of the Baigas, "no missionaries of any religion" were to be "permitted to break up tribal life."³⁴ If in his later work he did not further emphasize the evil effects of missionary activity, it was so presumably because it is not found in a marked degree among the Baigas and the Gonds, whose problems he principally dealt with.

Isolationism or assimilationism does not, therefore, appear to owe its inspiration either to the supposedly queer academic interest of the anthropologists or to the possibly perverse mentality of the British administrators. It is very largely a matter of opinion as to the best way of preserving the vitality of the tribal people, only secondarily complicated by other considerations. Dr. Hutton, for example, who was very much impressed by the results of culture-contact in the Pacific, seeing its operations in the Andaman Islands, failed to distinguish between the state of affairs in the Pacific and that in India. Finding that the laws administered by the British courts of justice involved such acute discomfort to the tribalists that they might succumb to "psychical apathy" and undergo "physical decline," he suggested that they should be

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 512, 515.

kept entirely out of the impending changes in the Indian constitution. Perhaps they would be able to form, whenever they were ready for it, a federation of their own on an all-India basis! That was truly isolationism.

Isolationism could have a real chance only if the tribal tracts were, in the terminology of the Government of India Act of 1935, completely "excluded." When it was decided by those in authority that that was not feasible and the provision of partial exclusion was largely employed to safeguard the interests of the so-called aborigines, Dr. Hutton's interest was turned more to the ills of these people and their remedies than to their constitutional position. We find in his later writing a far more comprehensive treatment of the problems of primitive tribes than in his earlier one. This is not to maintain that Dr. Hutton is satisfied that the constitutional situation is all right or that he is resigned to it. No, he is not. He points out that many of the smaller tribes, which were in need of even the truncated protection that is available under partial exclusion, have been completely forgotten. He is disconsolate over the Ministers' position in the matter of the Partially Excluded Areas. He has not produced any piece of evidence to doubt either the capacity of the Ministers to handle the problems of the tribes or their solicitude for them. He has not mentioned any instance of the rightful claims of the aborigines being unheeded. And yet he does not like ministerial control over tribal areas. The ostensible reason put forward by him is that the true interests of the aborigines might be sacrificed to the political exigencies. He has not substantiated his fears by pointing out some examples of such sacrifice. And we have seen in another connection that the record of the Indian Ministers and the executive is not only clean but even positively favourable. The real reason for Dr. Hutton's dissatisfaction with the present constitutional arrangement must be that it does not procure segregation of the so-called aborigines. And it is only under segregation that, according to him, the tribal peoples will make sufficient advance to produce their own leaders in the field of life's activity, who will not only "fulfil the needs of their own tribesmen," but also serve as their "quota of original and individual genius to the national

life of India." Segregation will enable them to preserve their tribal languages.

He mentions almost all the minor ills, caused by the changes in clothing, in housing, and in household utensils, which were specifically brought to the notice of the public by Mr. Mills and later by Mr. Grigson, in the notes he submitted to the Census Superintendent of C. P. and Berar in 1931 and later in his reports on the aboriginal problem in the districts of Mandla and Balaghat; and he is sorry for their supposed evil effects. He is not happy over the abandonment of certain arts like that of wood-carving, dancing, and singing by some of the tribalists on their change over to Christianity. He even laments the creation of new wants that drive the more enterprising people to seek gainful work outside in the coal-mines or on the tea-gardens and the introduction of money, as these lead to a change in values.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that he does not want the so-called aborigines to change their mode of life or that he desires to see them keep up all the elements of the tribal cultures. He speaks of the distinct gains the tribes have made from the British rule, among which reading and writing is one, and modern medicine another. Even more than this he mentions as a great point in favour of their segregation the fact that under the rule of segregation the Assam tribes have produced "the necessary number of doctors, teachers, etc." Now surely when he appreciates the feat of the tribesmen in mastering modern medicine and other kinds of modern learning, as teachers and doctors must, he cannot for a moment, think that their tribal culture should or can remain intact. Tribes producing such individuals must change their culture from the tribal to the national and even to the international type. Dr. Hutton, thus, in his latest pronouncement on the subject, appreciates a change in tribal culture, but he desires that it should not be brought about by outsiders, because in that case it comes about too quickly for it to be smoothly adopted. Segregation would, in his opinion, provide that optimum of protection which would eliminate this chance of rapid and discomfortable change. He may well be called an

isolationist, because he is convinced that isolation will alone procure the necessary conditions for a smooth change. He is by no means a no-changer. Nor does there appear to be any other consideration, like that of aesthetic appeal of the tribal mode of living, weighing with him in his final opinion.

Mr. Verrier Elwin's attitude to the constitutional provision for the protection of these tribes is different from Dr. Hutton's. He admires and even desires the indirect rule of Aboriginal Africa for the preponderatingly aboriginal tracts in India. He is fairly satisfied with the measure of protection sought to be provided through the expedient of Partially Excluded Areas. He is, however, disappointed because the suggestion of the Secretary of State and the Government of India for the appointment of special officers is not or was not taken up enthusiastically by the Provincial Governments. He points out that the expedient, for whatever it is worth, leaves more than half the aboriginal population of the Central Provinces without even that protection. The reaction of this expedient in the minds of Indian nationalists has been unpleasant. This destroys the chance of even that measure of protection which could have been otherwise forthcoming under the Act of 1935. Writing, as he did, about the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942 about the need of the application of a specialist's knowledge to measures of development intended for the tribalists, he still observes: "But will the new Government of India be willing to do this? The attitude of Indian, chiefly Hindu, leaders and politicians is frankly hostile to any attempt by science to inspire or control administrative or legal measures. The policy of protection is probably dead." It is clear that Mr. Elwin has realized what Dr. Hutton does not seem fully to have, the improbability of protection as they desired it. His scheme of a "National Park" for the Baigas or his proposals for the rehabilitation of the Hinduized sections of the Gonds, the Korkus, and the Baigas must, therefore, be considered as intended to be achieved through the expedient of the Partially Excluded Areas of the present constitution or through an appeal to the Indian nationalists on behalf of unjustly treated peoples.

However may the scheme and the proposals be sought

to be put into practice, let us here try to understand their true nature. As we have seen, his scheme of a "National Park" is intended to apply to that section of the so-called aborigines which has still kept itself vigorously tribal. In that "park" there will be no schools, education being not considered good for the people of the "park." Outsiders will be licensed so that only amiable and amenable sorts of people get within the charmed circle. The people will practise shifting cultivation, and will be governed by their own customs through their own elders. They will be encouraged to keep to their own ideas of aesthetics, etc. In short, there will be nothing that will present a contrast, either visual or mental, to the full-blooded tribal culture of the Baigas, the Murias, and others. Thus are they to be kept in "innocence and happiness for a while till civilization is more worthy to instruct them and until a scientific age has learnt how to bring development and change without causing despair."³⁵ For all practical purposes Mr. Elwin must be considered to be not only an isolationist but a no-changer as far as the uncontaminated aborigines are concerned, in spite of his disclaiming himself to be an isolationist.

The Hinduized sections of the tribes, Mr. Elwin's second class, who, in his opinion, are suffering from loss of nerve and self-confidence, having their tribal solidarity largely impaired by various features of civilized administration, requires some education. But the education must be of a pattern quite different from the present one or even from that of the "Wardha Scheme." The peculiar feature that must distinguish it from the latter scheme is that it must "conserve and develop aboriginal culture, religion, and tribal institutions." The language through which present education is given is Hindi, which is spoken and understood by a large number of these Gonds, though their mother tongue is Gondi. Yet he speaks of Hindi as a foreign tongue. Earlier he was even doubtful whether any education should be introduced in the district of Mandla in particular, and in all the Partially Excluded Areas of the C. P. in general, though Mr. Grigson was quite clear about its need. Mr. Grigson observes: "What the aboriginal really

³⁵ "Loss of Nerve," p. 50.

needs is some knowledge of reading, writing, and elementary mathematics, of the ways of the *Sahukar*, the *patwari*, and the shopkeeper, and of some means of supplementing his living."³⁶ The success of a school must be judged, according to Mr. Elwin, "not on the number of children who complete the course (which in any case, should not last longer than two years), but by the way in which it has succeeded in preventing the introduction of reactionary social customs . . . and in increasing the self-respect and self-reliance of the aboriginal." He wants Government to take charge of primary education in all the Partially Excluded Areas and introduce therein the type of education just described.³⁷

It is clear that he wants the schools to din into the ears of the boys and girls of the Hinduized section of the Gonds and others that everything that their forefathers did is good, and what their parents have taken up from the Hindus is bad, so that their Gond or Korku or Baiga self-respect may be re-awakened. Mr. Elwin not only looks upon Hindi as a foreign tongue, but also considers its introduction as destructive of "a whole world of poetry and legend." Gondi is, or was, till the missionaries gave it the Roman script, an unwritten tongue. The poetry that is there in it is purely of the nature of folk-songs. The legends of the Gonds are already highly Hinduized as can be judged from their greatest song—the lay of Saint Lingo, as Forsyth has called it. Yet in comparison with Hindi poetry Mr. Elwin opines that Gondi folk-song poetry is greater. This attitude to Hindi language and its poetry can only be interpreted as an indication of his desire to see the Hinduized Gond rehabilitated to the purest Gondi culture. This becomes clearer when we see that another anthropologist, Mr. Grigson, with as much interest and sympathy as, and with much greater experience of administering a preponderatingly aboriginal tract, is in favour of Eastern Hindi or Chattisgarhi being used as the medium of instruction, in spite of the demand of the Gonds for Gondi. His words are: "Could not Eastern Hindi or Chattisgarhi be used in the tribal areas where it is the *Lingua franca*? Gondi is the spoken language of much

³⁶ "Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District," p. 42.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

of Mandla and Niwas, and the Gond, here as in Betul, is asking for its recognition in the schools."³⁸

Mr. Elwin's attitude toward some of the festivals, which are generally occasions for heavy drinking, is that of a no-changer. He is not in favour of closing liquor-shops at festivals; for "the aboriginal does not keep the festivals on any fixed days, his Dasehra, for example, being spread over a month at different villages, and his Phag lasting as long as the spirit moves him."³⁹ Evidently no attempt has been made or is to be made to restrict the period of the celebration of a festival which is made to coincide only with "the spirit" of the people, i. e., which ceases only when the people are thoroughly debauched. We have seen how among the Santals, a much more excitable and headstrong people than the Gonds or the Baigas, the celebration of their national festival, Sohrae, was long ago brought within the limits of a reasonably short period. The logic of Mr. Elwin's objection may be plainly put in this way. The aborigines drink inordinately at their festivals. The festivals are celebrated over an indefinitely long period. If you close the liquor-shops, they will have to be kept closed indefinitely. The aborigines will not only resent this curtailment of their liberty, but will tend to hoard liquor in advance for the occasion or illicitly distil it for themselves. Therefore do nothing but allow the aborigines to soak themselves in liquor till they can take no more, when the festival and inordinate drinking will automatically cease till another such festival occurs, which is sure to happen twice a year, if not thrice. The ordinary reaction to this situation would have been to close the liquor-shops during the celebration of festivals, and that would have been wrong. The informed and rational reaction should be to try to curtail the period of the duration of a festival, without closing the shops, as a first step. As has been pointed out above, this has actually been done among the Santals. One can attribute the above logic of Mr. Elwin to his desire to see the aborigines reinstated in their old tribal ways, irrespective of any other consideration.

Mr. Elwin's contention regarding the loss of practice of

³⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

arts and crafts and the impairment of the aesthetic sense is another indication of his attitude towards Hinduized Gonds and their falling off from their hypothetical tribal culture of the past. He supposes that when the Gonds were a true tribe, uncontaminated by Hindu or any other influence, they practised most of the arts and crafts as "each isolated tribe depended on its own efforts for all the material goods that it required." Under the influence of the caste-system of the Hindus, sections of the Gond tribe practising various specialized crafts and arts fell away from the main body and were counted as castes. The main body thus bereft of its craftsmen was impoverished as regards its artistic and economic needs. At present the section of this body which is Hinduized shows hardly any evidence of the practice of an important art or craft, and is generally devoid of all creative activity. "It is hard to understand why contact with the outside world should so quickly destroy this love of decoration and power to create useful and beautiful things."⁴⁰ It may be inferred from this quotation that Mr. Elwin himself is not thoroughly satisfied with his own explanation of the supposed loss of arts and crafts by the Gonds; otherwise it is not impossible that a people who lose their arts and crafts and thus are devoid of families with some kind of artistic tradition, may come to be rather apathetic toward things beautiful. But the genesis of the loss of arts and crafts is queerly bold. The Hindus, who are known to have developed arts and crafts to a very high pitch of perfection, are supposed to have taken away from the Gonds their craftsmen as a separate caste, rendering them craftless. On the other hand, the Gonds, who are not known to have done much by way of artistic effort, are supposed to have had practitioners of most arts and crafts among them. And this reasoning is based only on the supposition that the Gond tribe must have been a tribe in the fullest sense of the term, i. e., with an economic organization almost complete in itself. The tribe is believed to have been self-sufficient. The ground for this belief is provided by the myth of utter isolation. A little study of ancient Indian commerce, as revealed by ancient literature of the Hindus as well as by the writings of

40 "Loss of Nerve," p. 34.

early travellers or visitors to this country, is enough to dispel this notion of lack of communications and consequent isolation. To say the least, the explanation is so hypothetical without any facts to prove it that it should not have been ordinarily accepted by any serious student. It appears the Gond has been a particularly dull fellow about arts and crafts. Writing about the representation of their objects of worship by the Gonds and the Korkus, Forsyth remarked:⁴¹ "Their art is of the rudest character, often outraging the requirements of Hindu orthodoxy—suited, in fact, to the mental calibre of a people scarcely yet emerging from mere fetishism." Col. Dalton's testimony is even more decisive. He observes: "The Hill Gonds appear to be very backward in arts. An artisan of their own race is rarely met with, but like other tribes they have availed themselves of the services of low Aryan craftsmen who live with them, accommodate themselves to Gond habits of impurity, and in return for a scanty means of subsistence do all the weaving and pottery required."⁴² The Gonds thus do not seem to have shown much aptitude for arts and crafts, whether they are the hill-sections or those who are Hinduized. The Baigas, too, are not very much better. They are losing their hold on the basket-trade and now buy much of the bamboo-work from others, particularly the Dhulia sub-tribe of the Gonds. Mr. Elwin's explanation of the Baigas' abandonment of basket-making is worth noticing. They are believed to have lost it partly because of an agitation by the Basor, the traditional bamboo-working caste, that working in bamboo is their caste-work. Yet the Dhulia Gonds carry on that work without bothering about the agitation of the Basors. The Baiga women carry on the work of tattooing even the Gond women⁴³ in Balaghat district, though in other parts, as we have seen, the Gond females do the same work for Hindu women. It appears that the practice of a particular art or craft by a particular tribe or group depends on its capacity relatively to the capacity of another tribe or group in the locality. The whole society composed of tribes, castes, and groups, as is already pointed out in another connection, has

41 Op. cit., p. 143.

42 "Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal," p. 284.

43 Grigson: "Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District," p. 25.

long been fairly integrated on the basis of specialization. If in the face of such facts, or even ignoring such facts, Mr. Elwin holds the opinion that the Gonds have lost their arts and crafts and have consequently suffered diminution in their artistic sense, it must be because he is a no-changer who wants to revive the tribal cultures in their supposed pristine purity. As if to support his contention about the deterioration in artistic sense under Hinduization, he points out that one of the items of reform included in the Raj Gond movements is to discourage Gond women from wearing "their traditional ornaments." Herein, as generally in his contention about the loss of love of decoration, he has surely allowed his enthusiasm to get the better of facts. Even now in Hindu and Mussalman society, finery for boys, like colourful caps and even coats, are not a thing of the past. It is not only Maharajas, Chiefs, and Chieftains, who wear colourful dress and rich Hindu ornaments on all formal occasions, but even rich merchants are seen with gold bracelets or pearl or diamond ear-rings. Lesser folk put on silver armlets and silver waist-bands. Hindu and Mussalman women wear quite colourful dresses; and the former of all classes don variegated flowers over their hair on the head. Hindu women of well-to-do classes wear diamond, pearl, and gold ornaments which, in the case of a typically orthodox woman, it would be hard to surpass in variety, quantity, and spread. Lower-class women show the same appetite for ornaments, but have it satisfied in less costly material. About the ornaments of the Gonds and the Korkus, Forsyth wrote: "Quantity rather than quality is aimed at; and both arms and legs are usually loaded with tiers of heavy rings—in silver among the more wealthy, but rather than not at all, then in brass, iron, or coloured glass. Ear and nose rings and bulky necklaces of coins or beads are also common."⁴⁴ To see loss of aesthetic sense or even diminution of love for abornment among the Raj Gonds in their desire to change their women's ornaments is a mistake, which an ethnographer like Mr. Elwin could have committed only because of his overzealousness for the hypothetical tribal culture of the Gonds. His attitude, therefore, toward the lack of practice of arts and crafts among

⁴⁴ Op. cit., p. 148.

the Hinduized Gonds and his attribution to them of decay of aesthetic sense are indications of his being a no-changer and a revivalist.

In the matter of civil law the aborigines have suffered hardships because sometimes Hindu law has been applied to them. Even when it is laid down, as for example by the C. P. High Court about the Gonds, that neither the Hindu Law nor the Indian Succession Act applies to a tribe, its members find it hard to prove a particular custom as the prevailing law in their tribe. Messrs. Grigson and Elwin state that under such conditions it is difficult for the Civil Courts to decide aboriginal suits coming within their purview. Both of them agree that only a detailed investigation into usages regarding devolution of property, etc. can provide an authoritative guide. The enquiry must be carried on in every important aboriginal district, as custom varies locally, and must be based upon actual cases, properly recorded. "The investigation to be of any use would have to last for two years, and be made by a small trained staff under the control of an anthropologist. Russell and Hiralal give absolutely no sound guidance." Mr. Elwin goes further and suggests that tribal customs regarding marriage, divorce, etc., should also be codified.⁴⁵ It is well-known that the British Government from the very beginning had very little desire to change the personal law of its subjects. Early attempts were made in some of the Provinces, by Steele and Borradaile in the Bombay Presidency and Tupper in the Punjab, to record the laws and customs of castes and tribes. Col. Dalton, Sir Herbert Risley, and William Crooke in their books give some account of marriage-customs, sometimes of the usages about adoption and often the law of inheritance and succession. The work of Russell and Hiralal, above referred to, forming part of the Ethnographical Survey of India, is no exception to this general practice. But these books cannot and were not expected to come up to the standard of monographs on separate tribes. Rivers' "Todas," for example, which is the archetype in English language of all such monographs, is incomparably superior to the article on the Todas in Thurston's "Tribes and Castes of Southern India."

45 Grigson: "Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District," p. 7.

Where custom is supposed to vary from district to district, the shortcomings of a general book are bound to be still greater in respect of details. Under the circumstances, such a book can only give general guidance. Mr. Grigson, who quotes from Russell and Hiralal, elsewhere, more often than once, and Mr. Elwin have no use for such guidance. They therefore propose an elaborate enquiry. Strange as it may appear, while the proposed enquiry under a trained staff and an anthropologist was to have lasted for two years, before two years were complete Mr. Elwin, who had a volume on another tribe ready for the press, was satisfied, as he was aware that three research students of three Universities had progressed in their investigations in respect of their proposed themes from that region. For he wrote: "It is possible that by the time the Nationalist Ministries return to office, sufficient material will have been assembled to allow them to base their measures of development on exact and scientific knowledge of the situation."⁴⁶

Mr. Elwin's proposal to codify customs, which vary locally, regarding marriage is well calculated to fossilize them. Customs are plastic, and thus have an advantage over law which is rigid. Once we codify them we make them more rigid than law. Law is generally the social mechanism of a society in which some central authority is considered to be the source of such law and to be competent to change it. Codified custom will be superior to the people among whom the customs prevailed. If custom is so well-known or if there is a definite authority which can voice it today, then there is no need for the kind of elaborate enquiry suggested by Messrs. Grigson and Elwin. Enquiry is necessary because in the present state of the tribal peoples no such authoritative statement of customs is possible. After the customs are codified, whatever little authority the tribal elders may have in their interpretation today will cease. A desired change in the codified customs then becomes very difficult. If the reformers suggest changes they can easily be rebuked by being told either that they do not represent their people, or that they do not understand their best interests, or that they are trying to imi-

⁴⁶ "Loss of Nerve," p. 45.

tate slavishly the Hindus or some other people, as the tribal reformers of today are being told by Mr. Elwin. Codification of customs can, therefore, only imply a desire to see the tribal people returning to their tribal culture and sticking to it. Even these suggestions regarding civil law and customs of the so-called aborigines, therefore, stamp Mr. Elwin as a no-changer and a revivalist.

Lastly, Mr. Elwin's attitude toward the tribal reform-movements, whether among the Hos or among the Gonds, is symptomatic of his keen interest in preserving tribal cultures as they are or as they were. In another connection we have shown how in his desire to condemn the reform movements he forgot to compliment the reformers on certain aspects of the proposed reforms, and how he imported certain features for criticism which did not exist in the programme. Even with respect to temperance he adopts the standard official attitude. He says: "Temperance in drink, provided it is a genuine impulse and not forcibly imposed, cannot fail to benefit the people."⁴⁷ This is the standard official position about temperance in India. How was Badalshah Bhai, or for the matter of that any single individual, going to force a people to leave their drink-habits? He can achieve his end only through preaching and personal influence. A single individual cannot employ a large force of volunteers to prevent the people from drinking liquor. He can work through the elders or the local tribal panchayats, wherever they exist. Is it wrong to use the influence of tribal elders or panchayats to prevent a hard-drinking people from drinking liquor? If it is wrong, then Mr. Elwin's plan of getting the tribes governed by their own elders is equally wrong. In both cases it is the use of the most usual and the least objectionable mechanism of social control that is proposed to be employed. It is the mobilization of the opinion of a public, which has more or less identical cultural attainments and constant mutuality with the people whose life, along with its own, it tries to govern or mould. Mr. Elwin's whole attitude to tribal reform-movements is thoroughly vitiated. Because some of the so-called reforms are obnoxious to one, either because one thinks, and rightly, that they are likely to

47 "Loss of Nerve," p. 43.

affect the vitality of the tribe adversely, or because one's aesthetic sense, one's love for the quaint and the picturesque, is offended, it does not follow that the right of the people to mould their lives according to their light should be stifled by creating a ring-fence round them and by preaching through the schools stabilization of the tribal traditions and customs.

From the above discussion of Mr. Elwin's views on various aspects of the life of the Hinduized Gonds and others, it becomes clear that Mr. Elwin wants to see them not only protected in their interests, which need such protection, but also stabilized in their old tribal culture or cultures. Mr. Elwin is, in respect of them, a revivalist. He is thus both a no-changer and a revivalist.

CHAPTER VII

The Problem

THE problems and ills of the so-called aborigines may be grouped under two categories. The first category is formed by those problems which, like those of new habits, language, and shifting cultivation, are peculiar to some or many of them, and are not common to other classes of Indian population. In the second category are comprised such problems as arise from the inroads of the British system of law and revenue on their solidarity, from the forest laws, and from the loss of their land as the combined result of the British system and the rapacity of the money-lending classes. The latter kind of problems, at least many of them, these people share in common with other classes of Indian population. They are also far more important to their very existence than the problems of the first category, which in comparison may be regarded as minor ills.

One of such ills peculiar to many of the aborigines is that they have begun to take to more spacious clothing than they were formerly accustomed to. Though they have begun to don this civilized clothing, they are not aware of, cannot afford, or do not practise civilized hygiene thereof. The result is that some of them have begun to suffer from skin troubles and such other diseases. It appears to us that this ill is rather made too much of. That some clothing in addition to the meagre apparel of their tribal existence is quite necessary for some of them will be admitted by all who know that in their habitat it is frosty cold in some months of the year. That they themselves feel the rigour of their climate is clear from the fact that they sleep just near a burning fire in their huts. We are not convinced that the evil of clothing is greater than the evil of sleeping in an ill-ventilated hut with a fairly big fire burning in it. Even supposing that skin diseases are being spread by the adopted clothing, it is so because these people do not carry out the regular washing of clothes which they require. They can pick up the practice of regularly washing.

their clothes much more easily from the same source from which Mr. Grigson believes they have adopted the habit of putting on additional clothing, i.e., by their contact with the population of the plains. Mr. Grigson himself tells us how both the Hill Marias and the Bison-Horn Marias are changing their habits about washing their bodies and their hair and are getting cleaner as a result of their contact with the plains' people.¹ It appears that many of these people did not receive their inspiration to wear more clothing than was sanctioned by their tribal custom through the proper channel of contact with the Hindus of the plains. Dr. Hutton has admitted that official and missionary zeal in this respect is responsible for the premature introduction of civilized clothing.² About 1872 a sympathetic Political Agent of the Juang hills agency in Orissa held an open-air durbar and had the Juang females, who were wearing their traditional attire of leaf apron, robed by a female attendant in Manchester *saris* at his own expense. "As they came out they cast their discarded *swadeshi* attire into the bonfire. Thus ended a picturesque survival."³ Did it? It is not only such active official interference in but also the general official attitude toward dress which is in no small measure responsible for premature adoption of unnecessary or unaccustomed clothing. The following incident narrated in the same census report, in which are incorporated Mr. Grigson's notes regarding the ills of the so-called aborigines, this about unwashed clothing being one of them, may be noticed. "It was only a few years ago that the life of the Divisional Forest Officer of South Chanda, who was picked up and carried off by a man-eating tiger, was saved by a Maria. The latter was awarded the Albert Medal, the only resident of this Province who has received that honour. When His Excellency the Governor was to decorate him with the medal it was decided that he could not pin it on as the hero was dressed in only a loin cloth."⁴ Further comment is needless. These minor ills like clothing, housing, etc., can be righted through the same agency that has given rise to them and not by segregating the people.

1 "The Maria Gonds of Baster," p. 66.

2 O'Malley: "Modern India and the West," p. 435.

3 Risley: "The People of India," footnote to Pls. XIX and XX.

4 "Census of India, 1931, C. P. and Berar Report," pp. 410, 216-17.

Another partial problem and hardship is in connection with the practice of shifting cultivation. There are some tribes like the Birhors, the Korwas, the Baigas, and the Konds, which have not yet taken to plough-cultivation. In the case of some, like the Birhors, the Korwas, and the Konds, no attempt at settling them as plough-culturists was ever seriously made. It does not appear that they have any religious belief to prevent their being properly settled if a sympathetic attempt is made in that direction. The Baigas are perhaps the only fortunate people who were tried to be turned to plough-culture by special help being given. They were also shown special consideration by the reservation of an area of about twenty-two thousand acres wherein they have been allowed to carry on their shifting cultivation under certain conditions. The problem of the Baigas is, however, complicated by their belief that to plough the land is to lacerate the breast of mother earth, which brings upon the people the wrath of the gods.

How the problem of keeping these people contented should be solved, depends not only on the feelings of the Baigas, though they ought to be given an important place in the formulation of any solution, but also to a large measure on the findings of science regarding the consequences of shifting cultivation. We have already quoted authorities to show the natural economic importance of the forests of the central belt. Forsyth long ago suggested that all "treatment irksome to their wild and timid nature which is not necessitated by the general requirements of the country" should be avoided.⁵ Mr. Elwin quotes this opinion with evident approval.⁶ We think the suggestion is broad and sound enough to be adopted as a general principle in administration of backward peoples. The question then turns on the view one takes of the effects of shifting cultivation in the present instance. That the region is valuable is not to be doubted. If it can be established beyond doubt that shifting cultivation does not cause significant damage to the forests or to the surrounding plains, then, doctrinaire uplift apart, there is no rational ground for causing these people hardship by forbidding them their practice of shifting cultivation. Mr. Elwin has tried to prove that with

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁶ "Loss of Nerve," p. 9.

proper precautions the practice of shifting cultivation is almost innocuous.⁷ Mr. Grigson has added some further support, from a book on soil erosion, to the contention that shifting cultivation does no harm to the soil. He has also pointed out that in the tract in which the Baiga Chak—reservation for the Baigas—is located, it is the only form of cultivation likely to give fair means of subsistence to them. The soil is so poor that without heavy manuring or the burning of the branches as is done in the other or Gond variety of shifting cultivation, the cultivators are not likely to get even fair crops. After detailing the difficulties of raising proper crops in the soil at their disposal, he observes: "The only alternative appears to be the burning of forest-growth and raising of crops in the ashes. At least the Baiga is not being taught how otherwise to raise crops, either by the Forest, or much less, by the Agricultural Department." He, therefore, recommends that contentment of the Baigas should be restored and preserved by giving them adequate facilities for shifting cultivation, which, in his opinion, can be done "without harm to any valuable forest." Another reason for his suggestion is that shifting cultivation is allowed and actually practised in the neighbouring tracts of the Bilaspur Zamindaris.⁸

This is a subject on which the views of an anthropologist or an ordinary administrator, however intelligent, cannot be regarded as the final word, which must lie with forestry experts. Between the publication of "The Baiga" and "Loss of Nerve," Mr. Nicholson, the Conservator of Forests, giving evidence before the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee of Orissa, stoutly maintained that the damage done to the forests by shifting cultivation was serious and that only "under certain conditions, where the area of land available is large and population small, such cultivation does little harm." He further added that much depended on climate.⁹ Dr. N. L. Bor, Forest Botanist in the Forest Research Institute at Dehra Dun, in his presidential address to the section of Botany of the Indian Science Congress, 1942, observes: "Of all practices initiated by man the most noxious is that of shifting cultiva-

7 "The Baiga," pp. 123-31, 520; "Loss of Nerve," p. 16.

8 "Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District," pp. 23, 22, 24, 28.

9 "Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee, Orissa," p. 66.

tion." So much for the effect of shifting cultivation on vegetation. He then describes the process of soil erosion in the Assam Hills owing to the practice of shifting cultivation. He points out that the cultivator destroys the evergreen forest and in its place we get only less valuable vegetation. He characterizes it as "a grave misuse of land which is tolerated in certain tropical countries at the present day, but which, it is safe to say, will not be permitted for an instant once it is generally realized how dangerous it is to allow a certain class of people to do as they like with the vegetative covering of the area they occupy."¹⁰ A writer in a recent issue of *Nature*,¹¹ reviewing the "Report of Forest Administration in the Province of Assam for the year 1940-41," calls shifting cultivation "that most wasteful of agricultural methods." He attributes the backward condition of Assam tribes to the British policy of non-interference with tribal customs and observes: "The consequence is that, in spite of the lapse of well over half a century since forest conservation began to be introduced into parts of Assam, forest reservation has made little progress in the hills districts." He further quotes the following statement, from the report, evidently with approval: "The hill districts of Assam possess an inadequate proportion of Reserved or Protected forests which provides one reason for erosion and flood damage." In view of this fresh indictment of shifting cultivation from competent quarters, it is difficult to accept the argument and the statement of Messrs. Elwin and Grigson regarding its harmlessness. Even Dr. Hutton in his writing published between the two publications of Mr. Elwin, observes: "Obviously the practice of *bewar* [shifting cultivation] is uneconomic and detrimental to the interests of the Indian community as a whole, except perhaps in certain limited areas and under conditions of strict control."¹² Mr. Elwin quotes with approval the opinion expressed in the Mandla District Gazetteer that it is the variety of shifting cultivation which the Gonds practise that does permanent injury to the forests and not the one favoured by the Baigas.¹³ Thus even Mr. Elwin admits the permanent nature of the injury done to the forests

¹⁰ "Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Indian Science Congress," Pt. II, pp. 166-69.

¹¹ "Nature," Oct. 10, 1942, p. 440.

¹² O'Malley: "Modern Indian and the West," p. 432.

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India, New Delhi.

by one variety of shifting cultivation. On the whole, therefore, till the experts can assure us about the harmlessness of shifting cultivation we must look upon it as rather dangerous to the general life of the community of which the Baigas, the Gonds, the Konds, etc., form a part.

The question of reserving certain forest areas for the use of the Baigas or others so that they may practise their favourite method of shifting cultivation, must be considered with great circumspection. The probable effect of that method on the peoples themselves, as well as the extent of area proposed to be set apart and the future of the other population in the area, all become relevant considerations. It will suffice here to examine Mr. Elwin's proposal for a "National Park" for the Baigas, where also "the thousands of simple Gonds in their neighbourhood might take refuge."¹⁴ Mr. Elwin mentions the size of this part in terms which make it almost impossible for an outsider to find out the exact area covered by it. But an approximate idea can be given. Of the district of Mandla he leaves out only a small portion. Judging from the map of the district, the portion left out—it appears to be the wheat area—is about one-eighth of the whole district. The total area of the Mandla district is given as 5,089 square miles, with a population of over 4,45,000. The Gonds and the Baigas, the specially selected people as beneficiaries of the proposed "National Park," numbered in 1931 about 2,40,000. Leaving the portion of the district, not proposed to be included in the "Park," we take the area of the remaining part as about 4,400 square miles.¹⁵ Baihar tahsil of the Balaghat district is 1,566 square miles, and has a population of a little over 99,000, of which the Gonds and the Baigas number 53,000 odd.¹⁶ The areas of the feudatory state of Kawardha, the Pandaria Zamindari, the Pendra Zamindari, and the Lormi estate are respectively 900, 487, 774, and 92 square miles. The proposal of Mr. Elwin does not combine all these areas in total, and it is not possible to say exactly how much is intended to be included in the proposed Park. Taking it that at least half of

¹³ "The Baiga," pp. 124-25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

¹⁵ Area taken from the District Gazetteer and the population figures from Mr. Grigson's "Notes, etc." p. 46, though they are not exactly the same as those given by the Govt. of the C. P. in the "Parliamentary paper," cmd. 5064.

¹⁶ "The Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat District," p. 81, and "Parliamentary Papers," 19, pp. 1358, 1417.

this area is intended to be transferred to the "Park," we get the total approximate area of the "National Park" as about 6,900 square miles. Taking the population figures of the three Zamindaris of Pendra, Kenda, and Pandaria as in 1911,¹⁷ and those of Pendra and Kenda as in 1931,¹⁸ and treating them as the standards for the other areas in the proposed Park, the total area supports at present not less than 6,00,000 people. Mr. Elwin will like to reserve that area for the use of about 3,50,000 Gonds and Baigas, of whom the latter number only 38,000. At a fairly low estimate there are in this area about 2,50,000 people, who are non-aboriginal. Some of them like Powars, Telis, Kurmis, Lodhis, and Marars are among the best agriculturists of the tract. We have already seen in another connection that a fairly large number of Brahmin, Teli, and other landlords and farmers were settled in some parts of this area for a very long time, before the dominion of the British spread over it. What is to happen to all this population? Are they to be allowed to remain without any rights in their lands on license of the kind proposed by Mr. Elwin for the non-aboriginals? Mr. Elwin has not told us his definite plan, if any, for the accommodation of these people. Looking to the economic side of the question, it must be mentioned that the forests of the Mandla district alone yielded in the two years 1909-1911 more than 1,00,000 cubic feet of *sal* timber, over and above other products. Add to this the land revenue derived from the district. The area covered by forest in the other tracts of the "Park" may be as high as 70 per cent.¹⁹ Thus Mr. Elwin's proposal will deprive the State of a large income.

And what are the countervailing advantages? The one advantage claimed for this proposal is the delectation of the Baigas, their contentment, and their stability. The simple Gonds may also find a refuge therein. Will the plan produce plenty for the Baigas, or will it enable them to lead their lives in a more fruitful manner? Perhaps they will get more to eat—when one has ample land and large resources one is bound

17 "Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Zamindari Estates of the Bilaspur District," p. 7.

18 "Parliamentary Papers," 19, p. 1357.

19 "Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Zamindari Estates of the Bilaspur District," p. 15.

to get better subsistence. One charge generally made against these so-called aborigines is that they are indolent. Mr. Grigson defends the Baigas and the Gonds against this charge by pointing out that "constant malaria, venereal, and other diseases, primitive crops and poor soil do not make for good physique or excess of energy, not to mention undue sexual indulgence."²⁰ By removing or virtually banning most of the well-to-do and intelligent classes from the Park and leaving the Baigas and the Gonds in its possession, malaria cannot be more easily fought. To expect the State to finance a malaria-campaign over such an area with meagre revenue is to give a counsel of perfection which is sure to be put aside for all practical purposes. Will the primitive crops be substituted by better kinds of cereals? Hardly. Creation of such a Park is an added incentive to keeping on to the *status quo*, apart from the fact that better types of cereals are not easily amenable to the shifting types of agriculture. Over-indulgence in sex, which is admitted in the case of the Baigas also by Mr. Elwin, may be expected to increase rather than diminish in the particular circumstances. The Baigas believe that generally sex-desire must be gratified whenever it arises, and that they were a far more virile race when they were practising shifting cultivation without let or hindrance than at present.²¹ They will have their shifting cultivation, and they will try to live up to their belief of a return of great virility. Add to this the impetus given by the more ample feeding likely to result from larger plots available for cultivation. Thus for the physical and moral betterment of the people this plan holds no promise.

Is this shifting cultivation, which, under Mr. Elwin's scheme, can be practised only under the notion that land in this country is unlimited, propped up by the assumption that the country's resources are ample, and proposed with the presumption that the non-aboriginals have hardly any rights, and which, as we have reason to think, is not likely to make desirable changes in the Baigas' way of life, absolutely necessary? Is the Baigas' belief about lacerating the breast of mother earth so strong that with suitable machinery they cannot be

²⁰ "Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District," p. 36.

²¹ "The Baiga," pp. 267, 422.

persuaded to take to plough-cultivation without suffering from mental torture? Is it not that those so-called aborigines, who have been, more or less smoothly, taken over to plough-cultivation, have prospered and now lead a better life, enriching the State and the community at large? To illustrate the last point and to give a decisive answer to the question, we shall quote below what O'Malley, whose recent opinions on the problem of the so-called aborigines we have quoted above, wrote about the Hos of Kolhan in Singhbhum in 1910. Dealing with the developments which took place in Kolhan since Col. Dalton wrote about it in 1872 he remarks: "The reservation of forests by the Government has served to take 529 square miles of the area of Kolhan out of the occupation of the Hos, and the protection of 208 more square miles has further restricted the area of cultivation. Both measures have directly served to check the nomadic habits of the people and to bind them within the limits of their villages, so that they have learnt to attach a greater value to their lands and to bestow more labour and care on their cultivation than they ever did in former times. . . . Cultivable wastes, which were previously neglected because it was less troublesome and more profitable to cultivate forest-covered lands, have been brought under cultivation, with the result that there has been a remarkable increase in cultivated area. Primary education, too, has done much towards civilizing the Hos, for instead of being a wild and turbulent race, they are now a peaceful and industrious people who give little trouble to the authorities."²² Further, it should be remembered that the practice of shifting cultivation existed as far south as Mysore and Kanara, and that it has been successfully prohibited, and that the Kolis in Gujarat, the Thakurs in Thana, and the Bhils in Khandesh have settled down to plough-cultivation.²³

The Baigas' religious belief about ploughing does not appear to be so strong as to be either a real obstacle in the way of settling them down to proper agriculture or a rankling thorn in the minds of those who realize its benefits. This is

²² "District Gazetteer of Singhbhum," p. 72.

²³ "Indian Administration During the Past Thirty Years," (1889), p. 30; "Statement exhibiting the moral and material progress and condition of India," Vol. V. (1872-73), p. 92.

the impression we have formed on reading carefully the life, histories, and the dreams which Mr. Elwin has recorded in his book, "The Baiga." The following observation in the District Gazetteer of Mandla, 1912, is of interest in this connection: "In fact, only about one-fifth of the Baiga population of the district live in the Baiga Reserve; and of these only 74 families, in only three of the six villages, now practise *bewar* [shifting cultivation] at all." This does not mean that there is no complaint or that matters are perfectly all right. For "in his heart of hearts, the Baiga has still a contempt for regular cultivation, which is reflected in his story that God made him king of the forest, with all the wood-craft necessary to wring from the jungle the eatables wherewith for his benefit it has been stocked; whereas Hindus and such other inferior persons lack this wisdom, and are chained perforce to the drudgery of cultivation."²⁴ The Baigas have also evaded actual cultivation by themselves by sub-letting their fields to men who will plough them.²⁵ Once they stop their shifting cultivation and see proper agriculture carried on by themselves or by others for them, with favourable seasons it should be possible for the lesson to be borne in on them that plough-cultivation gives better results than their own method. The objection to plough-cultivation is at bottom a refusal to take to a kind of work which the Baigas consider fit only for their inferiors. For, though the religious element is there yet, as Mr. Grigson remarks, "Many of them have too long 'lacerated the breasts of Dharti Mata' (mother earth) to worry too much." On two occasions he was actually asked by people to help them to get additional land for ploughing. Mr. Elwin, commenting on Mr. Grigson's remarks, maintains that such a statement cannot be made about the wilder Baigas of Pandaria, Kawardha, etc., and ascribes the transformation of the Mandla Baigas to fifty years of weaning policy.²⁶ Granting his argument, it is clear that with appropriate inducement it is possible to wean the Baigas from shifting cultivation and settle them to proper agriculture. As it is, the Baigas of the Mandla district and of the non-wild parts of the Balaghat district together form

²⁴ Pp. 74, 73.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 176.

²⁶ "Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District," p. 22 and f. n.

half the total number of Baigas. If the rather unsystematic and partially unsympathetic efforts of Government have been able to change the pattern of religio-industrial behaviour of a people in only two generations, this pattern cannot be regarded as having that force which will be a serious obstacle to the desired change or will leave behind it mental torture as its legacy.

That the plan put forward by Mr. Elwin is neither calculated to serve the best interests of the Baigas and the Gonds, nor rendered necessary by the peculiar nature of the Baigas' reaction to plough-culture, is further supported by some of the observations of Mr. Grigson regarding the Balaghat district. Discussing the work at the cattle farm at Garhi he tells us that practically every cultivator he met there was a Marar non-aboriginal, and that the agricultural work of the farm was not designed so as to improve the cultivation carried on by the aborigines. Yet he observes: "Undoubtedly of course part of what is done by the farm for cattle-breeding, fruit-farming, improved crops and rural uplift will ultimately and slowly find its way into the Gond and even the Baiga villages." His opinion about the role of the Marars in the economy of the whole Province in general, and that of the so-called aborigines in particular, is even more emphatic and reveals the weakness of Mr. Elwin's plan still more clearly. We shall quote the passage as it is: "The debt which the aboriginal cultivator throughout owes to these pioneers of settled, often intensive cultivation, is immense, and to them and not the Agriculture Department is due whatever advance the average Gond or Maria of the most backward areas has made in cultivation. Although the colonization policy followed in Baihar since the formation of the district has not had altogether desirable results so far as exploitation of aborigines by outsiders is concerned, to its credit must be set the lessons taught to the aboriginal by these industrious Marar cultivators. The Agriculture Department would be well-advised to recruit demonstrators in backward areas from this community." His experience of the condition and mentality of the Baigas of the forest-villages is no less interesting. He found that only in one village the Baigas lamented over the cessation of shifting cultiva-

tion. "Even there and in several other Baiga villages the people described the idea that it was a crime against mother earth to lacerate her breasts with the plough as a tale of long ago." It is noteworthy that here Mr. Grigson does not volunteer the reasoning which Mr. Elwin put forward in respect of his observations regarding the Mandla district mentioned above. We may take it that he does not consider it substantial. He goes further and unwillingly nullifies to a large extent his own argument in favour of shifting cultivation which he advanced in his Report on Mandla. There, he contends, as seen above, that shifting cultivation should be permitted in the British parts of Mandla adjoining the zamindari estates, where it is allowed presumably because the Baigas would, otherwise, shift to those estates. In the Balaghat district near the forest-village of Jholar, there are *khalsa* villages and zamindari estates where shifting cultivation is allowed; and yet, in Mr. Grigson's words, "there is no rush of Baigas from other parts of the district to settle in that wilderness."²⁷

The above discussion should lead one to the conclusion that Mr. Elwin's proposal of a "National Park" is rather ill-thought and extravagant. An extravagant proposal and its background of unreasonable claims is hardly the best method of serving the cause of the so-called aborigines, which Mr. Elwin has so much at heart.

A large number of the tribes, like the Santals, the Mundas, the Oraons, the Konds, the Gonds, the Korkus, speak languages which either belong to the Kherwari or Mundari group of languages or to the Dravidian family, and are, more often than not, different from the languages of the plains' people among whom they have their being or with whom they have a large amount of social intercourse. The languages of the latter in the majority of cases belong to the Indo-Aryan family. Many of these tribes, though they have preserved their tribal languages, can and very often do employ the Indo-Aryan languages of the surrounding people in their routine intercourse. Many of them thus are bi-lingual, having their own mother tongue and having more or less acquired the language of the neighbouring people. There are others, like the

²⁷ "The Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat District," pp. 16, 17.

Baigas, who have taken up the Indo-Aryan tongue of the locality in place of their own language, whatever it might have been. Others like the Bhils speak languages which are more or less dialects of the local languages. In all cases the languages spoken by the so-called aborigines were till recently only spoken tongues and had no scripts of their own. Needless to say, they have had no literature, the only kind of it being what is known as folk-literature, viz., folk-songs and folk-tales. There is some poetry enshrined in some of the folk-songs. Whether the poetry is of high value or not, naturally these folk-songs make a strong appeal to the aborigines who have been accustomed from their childhood to listen to and to chant their tunes.

Christian missions, when they began to work among these people, felt the need of reducing their languages to writing in order to spread the gospel among them through their languages. The missionaries therefore prepared grammars for some of them after a close study of the spoken tongues, and wrote the languages in the Roman script. Sir Richard Temple noted in 1866 that some thought that the Devanagari alphabet would afford much better means of conveying the sounds of the words of the Gondi and other dialects, though they were being written in the Roman script.²⁸ Though the missionaries benefited these people by providing grammars for their languages, they have placed them under a disadvantage by adopting the Roman script for writing them, so long as the neighbouring peoples use the Devanagari script for their languages, or in a very few cases the Telugu script. If the so-called aborigines have to learn to write the languages of their neighbours, to start with they have to master two scripts, the Roman for their tribal language and the Devanagari for their language of social intercourse outside the tribal world. Those of them who can proceed to higher education will find compensation for the pains they took in learning the Roman script. But the percentage of such is bound to be small. The large majority of the learners then are loaded with an unnecessary burden at the initial stage when, in order that education may spread among them, handicaps and difficulties should

28 Hislop: "Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces," p. VII.

not be more than the irreducible minimum. This is the case if the so-called aborigines have to learn the languages of their neighbours. Dr. Hutton sees great use for them in such learning. All those who do not subscribe to the doctrine of segregation and no change, will admit the great urgency of these people learning to write the languages of their neighbours, so that they will be able to carry on their dealings with the plains' people free from one of the disadvantages they have suffered from.

That the preservation of so many uncultivated languages is not very desirable should be granted by those who have to carry on the administration. In the district of Singhbhum there are eight or nine tribal dialects over and above the Indo-Aryan languages spoken by the non-aboriginal population. Mr. Lacey describes the situation thus: "The babel of tongues rises most loudly from the eastern half of Singhbhum district."²⁹ Ten years earlier Mr. Tallents wrote: "The smaller dialects are taking an unconscionable time over dying, and the more important non-Aryan languages are still holding their own."³⁰ Forsyth in 1872 was much more explicit. He said: "There is nothing that is worth preserving in these rudimentary indigenous tongues, and their inevitable absorption in the more copious *lingua franca* of the plains is not at all to be regretted."³¹ Discussing the educational and other problems of the Gonds and others in the Mandla district Mr. Grigson observes: "But the loss of the language [tribal] certainly simplifies educational problems."³² We have already referred to his opinion that the language of instruction in the tract should be Eastern Hindi, which is the language of the non-aboriginal people on that side. With regard to similar problems in the Balaghat districts, as he finds that the children of the so-called aborigines in the villages do not know any Hindi at the age when they first go to a school, he recommends that Gondi should be used as the medium of instruction in the first two years of the school career and Hindi thereafter. It is absolutely necessary for the aborigines to learn Hindi. He further wants that singing and

²⁹ "Census of India, 1931, Report on Bihar and Orissa," pp. 232, 233.

³⁰ "Census of India, 1921, Report on Bihar and Orissa," p. 218.

³¹ Op. cit., p. 140.

³² "Notes on the Aboriginal Problem in the Mandla District," p. 49.

composing of Gondi songs should be encouraged at the stages where Gondi ceases to be the medium of instruction.³³ Mr. D. Symington, dealing with the language problems of the Bhils and others, which is, as above mentioned, much different from that of the Santals, the Gonds, and similar people, emphatically recommends that instruction should not be given through Bhili or other dialects. He rightly observes: "These dialects, besides varying from taluka to taluka, are so far as I can ascertain merely corruptions of good speech and unworthy of survival. But it is very important that the teachers should know the local dialect."³⁴ In Kondmals, Ganjam and Koraput, where apparently instruction is imparted through Uriya, the Orissa committee recommends that the teachers in the schools of the tracts, where the Konds, the Saravas, and others are in fairly large numbers, should be required and encouraged to know the local tribal language, especially where Uriya is not understood by the children of the so-called aborigines.³⁵

It is seen that as the so-called aborigines live amidst people using languages different to and more highly developed than their own tribal languages, it is desirable to teach them these latter languages, if they are to hold their own in the routine intercourse of life which they have to carry on with the non-aboriginals. It is also clear that many administrative difficulties are solved if the language of the schools in any tract is the same as the language generally used therein. It is further noticeable that in the opinion of many there is very little of value to be preserved in the tribal languages. This is why, as Mr. Shoovert has remarked about Gondi in its contact with Hindustani or Marathi,³⁶ tribal languages or dialects tend to disappear with the spread of education and the expansion of closer association between the so-called aborigines and the non-aboriginal people. Where, therefore, the language of the surrounding people can be conveniently used as the medium of instruction, it should be used to good effect. The Hos have been taught through the medium of Hindi, and for a

33 "The Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat District," p. 70.

34 *Op. cit.*, p. 82, f. n.

35 "Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee," Orissa, pp.

35, 70.

36 "Census of India, 1931, C. P. and Berar Report," p. 315.

backward people they have made almost phenomenal progress in education.³⁷ Their problem is thus more or less solved. Regarding the Konds, the Saravas, the Gonds, and others similarly situated, wherever the local language is understood and is therefore made the medium of instruction, for some time to come the teachers will have to possess at least a working knowledge of the tribal languages, depending on the complexion of the tribal population of the tract. In the case of the Gonds, the Korkus, and others, whose children do not understand the local language, the medium of instruction in the earliest stages of education will have to be the tribal languages, supplanted by the local language in the higher classes of the school. Teachers for such schools will have to be proficient not only in the local language but also in the tribal ones. This solution of the problem of language in the education of the so-called aborigines has the largest support of informed opinion, and is the best under the circumstances.

The solution is based on the view that the tribal languages must be looked upon as only a means to an end. The end to be achieved is speedy and effective spread of education among the so-called aborigines. Only the no-changers, who desire to segregate the aborigines from the neighbouring people and to preserve them in their traditional stage of culture, will object to this end. Others will acclaim it as one of the most potent instruments of helping the so-called aboriginals to live a life of comparative comfort and self-respect. To achieve this end, the tribal languages may be used, wherever the conditions make their use imperative, even as media of instruction, so that the so-called aborigines may be attracted to the schools and may derive real benefit from them. Two more or less sure results will ensue. First, very soon the so-called aborigines will show a tendency to modify some traits of their culture, and gradually they will effect a change therein. Second, they will drop their tribal languages and will adopt, in the largest number of cases, the Indo-Aryan languages which, as instruments of expression, are more highly evolved than their own languages and possess a varied literature. It is only people, who, like Mr. Elwin,³⁸ entertain the belief that in this

³⁷ D. N. Maimudar: "A Tribe in Transition," pp. 197-203.

³⁸ "Loss of Nerve," p. 28.

process the aborigines get nothing "except the ability to read books to which they never will have access and to write on paper which they will not be able to afford to buy," that will not admit the gain resulting from the substitution of tribal dialects by Indo-Aryan languages. But belief like that of Mr. Elwin's is hardly the faith that should inspire a social worker. To have the use of a highly developed language and to be served by a varied literature is a privilege which not all people possess. All well-wishers of the so-called aboriginal people must look forward with hope and enthusiasm to the time when they can be placed in a position to enjoy these benefits.

It must be very plainly stated here that this is not a political view of the language-problem of the so-called aborigines. It is a perfectly orthodox anthropological point of view, especially as the cultural affinities of these people, through the possession of common substratum and the cultural interaction with their neighbours over a long period, are so great. In order to add to this view the weight of higher authority, we shall quote a few sentences from Dr. R. R. Marett's chapter on Language in his book called "Anthropology." He says: "If there is a moral to this chapter, it must be that, whereas it is the duty of the civilized overlords of primitive folk to leave them their old institutions so far as they are not directly prejudicial to their gradual advancement in culture, since to lose touch with one's home-world is for the savage to lose heart altogether and die; yet this consideration hardly applies at all to the native language. If the tongue of an advanced people can be substituted, it is for the good of all concerned." He refers to the then prevailing fashion among anthropologists to speak of the typical European peasant as being on a par with the typical savage in respect to general intelligence, and points out that, though the parity of potential intelligence be granted for the sake of argument, due to the fact of the European peasant possessing a language, which, as an instrument of clear thinking is very much better than that of the savage, the European peasant has an immense advantage over the savage. "Give them the words so that the ideas may come, is a maxim that will carry us far, alike in the

education of children, and in that of the peoples of lower culture, of whom we have charge."³⁹

Tribal solidarity has been broken by two distinct agencies. Hinduism and its absorptive process have broken up and are breaking up even now various tribes, sections of which seek and acquire some nook or corner in the Hindu social world. This leaves the section, not so absorbed, rather weak and smarting or benumbed under the feeling of brokenness. If sections of tribes get assimilated in the Hindu fold they are not ushered into an altogether strange social world. Hindu castes, at least many of them, have had and still have many of the characteristics of tribal society as regards the management of their internal affairs.⁴⁰ Tribal sections on joining Hindu society develop an internal organization of the caste pattern, and thus have the regulating and controlling power within themselves. The account given elsewhere, shows clearly that many of such tribal sections or tribes get smugly settled in the Hindu fold. Others not so fortunate strive for a proper status, and, in the effort at stabilization, they better themselves. The sections of tribes which have been left over do, perhaps, suffer from the loss of their brethren, but that is an inevitable consequence of a process which is natural, and which, if it can be shorn of the ugly feature of chicanery regarding land and labour, on the whole, is beneficial to the tribal people and to the whole society. If there were no other factors at work, the suffering would not have been long nor so much felt.

The real inroad on tribal solidarity is made by the introduction of the British rule. The collection of revenue, the establishment of the central police system, and of the judicial system have all contributed to the deterioration of the authority of tribal elders, and have established the practice of seeking escape from tribal authority through resort to British courts. No longer the same sense of dependence on the tribe and the consequent respect for its corporate opinion are felt in the old way. That the British system of centralized administration has directly or indirectly contributed to the break-up of tribal

³⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 151, 152.

⁴⁰ Ghurye: "Caste and Race in India," pp. 3-5.

solidarity is quite true. But this effect of the British rule in India has not been felt only by the so-called aborigines. The British system of law undermined the old sovereignty of Hindu castes, diminishing the authority of caste-panchayats, and encouraging individual members of caste to seek redress for their wrongs in British courts of justice. If the system has not broken the solidarity of caste as quickly and as much as it might have done, it is because of other factors that have come into play.⁴¹ And the inroads on caste-sovereignty would have been much more welcome than they have been but for the fact that the agency, which operated against the solidarity of caste, has still more affected the corporate sense of life of the village. The collection of revenue over a large part of the country directly from individual proprietors, the introduction of central police system to which the village headman was subordinated, weaning him away from the village community, tended to foster individualistic tendencies in place of the sense of corporate life in the village community. Far-seeing and sympathetic administrators had protested against the introduction of the particular revenue system as well as the centralized police system. They had even pointed out the need for continuing the corporate life of the village community, which some of them had found in certain parts of the country operating more or less vigorously. Some of them even succeeded in retaining some independence for the village headman. Some judicial functions of the village panchayat were continued in a truncated fashion. But the total effect was that life departed from the village community. General realization of the great harm done did not dawn on the British administrators till it was borne in upon them by the rude shock of the Deccan riots. Since then, however, tardy and half-hearted attempts were made from time to time to infuse life into the all but dead rural institutions of the past.⁴² During the last twenty years or so even more serious attempts have been made. Today it is generally recognized that the creation of a sense of corporate existence in the small local units of the Indian leviathan is a task of first-rate national importance.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-152.
⁴² *Loc. cit.*, pp. 23-24, 179-80; John Matthai: "Village Government in British India," pp. 10-19, 133-202.

Break-up of the solidarity of tribal life, which has come about through the operation of the British system of revenue and justice, is thus only one aspect of the general result, and not a peculiar phenomenon confined to the so-called aborigines. The problem created affects the larger whole and is different from the general problem of infusing a corporate sense in the local units not in kind but only in degree. It is, therefore, best tried to be solved along with the general problem. The obvious method of artificially segregating the so-called aborigines may prove to be a retrograde step rather than a solution affording scope for progress.

We have seen that many of the so-called aborigines have occupied, for a long time, most of the valuable forest areas of the region. They felled trees and carried on shifting cultivation with results which are generally considered to have been disastrous, not only to the forests but also to the soil on which they cultivated and to the surrounding region. Among some of them, who are taken under protection by the British Government, shifting cultivation has been so regulated that more and more forest area has been progressively reserved, and habits of steady plough-cultivation have been engendered among some of the peoples. Others, on the other hand, have been allowed to carry on their shifting cultivation, which they practise even today. That the treatment which is given to the forests of a region reacts not only on the forest dwellers but also on the neighbouring settled population, may be taken to be the general opinion of forestry experts. How the so-called aborigines use or will use their forests is thus not entirely a question for them to settle. The non-aboriginal plains' people are also vitally concerned in their response.

There are tracts, like parts of Chota Nagpur and the areas inhabited by the Baigas, the Gonds, the Korkus, and the Bhils, where the reservation of forest areas with the staff of foresters concerned with conservancy has necessitated the application of rules and regulations in respect of both the vegetable and the animal resources of the forests, which work as a hardship on these denizens of the forests, formerly accustomed as they were to the use of the forest products according to their desires and requirements. The stoppage of the one

and the easy source of satisfaction of some of their needs naturally irritates and depresses the people. But forest policy followed by British administrators in India has entailed hardships not only on the so-called aborigines but also on the settled villagers. Villages along the foot of the hills which are forested have depended and do depend upon forest produce for their complete economy. The forests adjoining the village are the natural grazing grounds for the cattle of the agriculturists, who resort to them also for collecting cow-dung and firewood. The manure of the village fields is provided by the cow-dung, dry leaves, and dry wood to be procured from the forests. Introduction of forest conservancy has meant, more often than not, very severe curtailment, if not entire stoppage, of such customary rights, on the exercise of which depends agricultural prosperity. Such grievances of the agriculturists were voiced before the authorities. Thus in 1893 cultivators in the Bombay Presidency stated it as one of their main grievances against the Forest Department that "in their desire to exploit the forests commercially, the department unduly restricted the lopping of trees" for purposes of using them in the preparation of seed-beds. The Royal Commission on Agriculture in India received no such complaints. Yet it found that in the United Provinces, the Panjab, the Central Provinces, and Bombay, no attempt was made to interest the villagers in development of forest-areas nearby or in the establishment of village-forests. Madras was perhaps the only Province in which the experiment was tried with a fair measure of success. Its own conclusion respecting the proper adjustment of the claims of the agriculturists on the forests is that "the management by the people, for the people, of the forests close to their villages, possesses so many desirable features that every effort should be made to ensure its success."⁴³ The non-aboriginal cultivators, too, have a number of grievances against the forest policy, which are connected with a vital aspect of their economy. Here, again, the problem of the so-called aborigines is not entirely different from that of the non-aboriginal population. It is desirable that the problems created by certain aspects of the forest policy should be considered as a

43 "Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Report," pp. 268, 270.

whole, and a solution, giving the maximum relief to all concerned, be accepted.

In certain areas inhabited by the so-called aborigines, they are required by custom to render some compulsory labour for their landlords at such times as may be decided upon by the latter. It has been found that the chief trouble of such labour, apart from the loss it involves to the person whose labour is thus demanded, is that it becomes a source of vexation. As for the loss to the person, whose compulsory labour is taken, it must be pointed out in justice to the landlord that in a number of cases he has put forward a fairly strong defence that the terms on which originally land was given to the tenants were lenient in view of these customary dues in terms of service. The Chota Nagpur Commutation Act was intended to enable tenants to get their customary services to their landlords commuted into cash payments. In other scheduled and protected areas, where the practice of compulsory labour existed, no such attempt seems to have been made. In those tracts, where the landlord has his own land managed as his domestic farm, and where local hired labour is rather difficult to procure, the system has a natural place in the economy of the tract, provided it is smoothy and sympathetically worked. In such tracts, even if it has worked to the detriment of the so-called aborigines, a solution satisfactory to both the landlord and the tenant is not easy. But the problem created by the demand for compulsory labour is not one which is peculiar to the so-called aborigines. The system is older than the British rule in India. "Compulsory labour in the interests of the village community has been in existence, in some form or other, in nearly every part of India."⁴⁴ Describing the forms of rent paid by certain tenants to their landlords in the United Provinces, Dr. S. S. Nehru points out that the rent paid by the low-caste tenants was pitched lower than the fair rent on the understanding that the tenant, known as *razil*, would provide manual labour. He speaks of this compulsory labour, which may be paid at traditional rather than market rates of wages, as labour rent.⁴⁵ Chamar tenants in Chattisgarh have to render similar service to their landlords.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ John Matthai: "Village Government in British India," p. 115.

⁴⁵ "Caste and Credit," p. 49.

⁴⁶ Russell and Hiralal, loc. cit., Vol. I p. 315.

Another evil besetting the aborigines is that of bonded labour. As we have already pointed out, this system consists in a person agreeing to serve out a loan he may take from a money-lender, a landlord or not. Though money-loans are small in amount, the manipulation of accounts is so arranged as to require the debtor to spend his life-time as a bondman, and not infrequently even his son may be found paying out his father's debt by similar service. Bonded labour is not restricted to the aborigines. Agricultural labourers in certain parts of the Bombay Presidency, and large numbers of such labourers in the Madras Presidency, work under a system which Dr. Pillai characterizes as agrestic serfdom.⁴⁷ The system of advancing money for purposes of marriage to a domestic or farm servant on the understanding or undertaking that he will pay it off by serving his creditor is fairly widespread on Bombay side. Bonded labour is not a unique feature of aboriginal life, but is to be met with very often where lower castes of suitable status are available. The *Kamiauti* system of Bihar appears to be not confined to the aboriginal tracts. Under that system cultivation is practically carried on by serfs.⁴⁸ One of its causes, or perhaps the principal cause, is that a man, among these castes, has to pay for a wife. Owing to the poverty of the people the amount to be paid as bride-price can only be raised by borrowing. If the creditors were honest, the system would solve a vital problem of life for the poor people of working capacity without causing them serious hardship. As it is, the evil is fairly common, and to be successfully eradicated requires to be handled wherever it exists.

Economic servitude is not confined to agriculture, but is also met with in small artisan industries. Artisans in certain crafts take the raw materials and wherewithal for their subsistence from capitalists in advance, and contract to hand over the manufactured articles for sale to the creditor. The system works in such a way that "the debt is practically irredeemable, and the artisan is transferred from capitalist to capitalist in a manner which practically amounts to sale and purchase." It should be particularly noticed that the honesty and the ignorance of law, so often attributed to the so-called-aborigines, are

47 "Economic Conditions in India," p. 108.

48 "Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Report," p. 434.

not altogether unknown in the agricultural and artisan sections of the population. The Royal Commissioners on Indian Agriculture observe: "The crushing burden of hereditary debt remains largely through ignorance of the legal position which is that no personal liability is transmitted and that no suit lies against the heirs of a deceased debtor except to the extent to which the property of the deceased has come into their hands by survivorship or succession."⁴⁹

There is another type of compulsory labour which the so-called aborigines are called upon to render. Government officers touring over the forest and hill areas can demand such labour from the people in order to carry their personal luggage, etc. They can also in some parts require the people to work on mending roads, etc., in the remote areas where regular labour is not likely to be available. For all such labour the labourer is to be paid at a certain rate which is generally lower than the market rate, and which is sometimes not paid by the petty servants of the State who exact it from the people. Such labour, if properly paid for, cannot be looked upon entirely as a tyranny. Generally such labour is expected and necessary for touring officers. A Bombay Committee, so late as 1930, received complaints that forced and unpaid labour was exacted from the members of the Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes.⁵⁰ Dishonesty and tyranny of lower servants of the State, which make compulsory labour the evil it is, perhaps press more heavily on the aboriginal people, to which such high officials as Dr. Hutton and Mr. Grigson have testified; who are much more ignorant than even the lowest castes of Hindu society, and who occupy localities which may not be visited by higher officials for a long time, than among other sections of rural population; but it cannot be said that the latter are entirely free from such experience. The true remedy for this evil lies in the field of administration. If the whole administrative machinery is tuned up higher, if the practice of dishonesty comes to be detected and then severely punished, then only the people, whether aboriginal or non-aboriginal, will be properly treated by the lower staff. The idea that servants of the State are the masters of the people has

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

⁵⁰ "Report of the Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes Committee," p. 47.

become strongly rooted in the whole machinery, the lower staff only venturing to put it into open practice in out-of-the-way places. The essential feature of the evil of compulsory labour exacted by Government servants is thus a part of a larger problem, which is general rather than peculiar to the aborigines.

The most important and general feature of the life of the people, as must be clear from the account of their doings and of the views of a number of writers given above, is that they get into debt, and that because of their simple nature and ignorance of law their debts increase beyond bounds. The classes which lend them the money take full advantage of the situation. The rights of transfer of property in land conferred by the British system of law and revenue make it possible for them to be manœuvred into selling their land to non-aboriginal landlords or money-lenders. Thus their lands pass on to the non-aboriginals. They become landless labourers. In a number of cases the headman is changed or his land bought in the same fashion, and the people suffer at the hands of the non-aboriginal headman.

The process of land passing from the hands of the cultivating classes into those of non-cultivating ones, who become absentee landlords, having little sympathy with the problems of their tenantry, is a feature noticeable in almost all parts of India, from the third quarter of the 19th century.⁵¹ For example, the money-lenders have "ousted numbers of improvident proprietors of the cultivating castes and many of them have become large landlords" in the Central Provinces.⁵² The part played by the British system of law and revenue in this process is fully recognized by the writers on the subject. Prof. D. R. Gadgil thus summarizes the situation: "The British had given rights of free transfer and absolute ownership—especially in the 'ryatwari' tracts—to the cultivators which they had never possessed before. Again the judicial system which had been adopted gave the money-lender a great power over his debtor, and finally the Limitation Act, making the renewal of the debt bond in short periods compulsory, made the posi-

⁵¹ Gadgil: "Industrial Evolution of India," (3rd ed.), p. 30; K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 3.

⁵² Russell and Hiralal, loc. cit., II. p. 134.

tion of the debtor much worse. Thus, though there was nothing in the nature of a peculiar hardship in the mere fact of an agriculturist being indebted, these other causes acting in concert had reduced the debtor, in many cases, to the position of a virtual serf. . . . The ease with which the money could be recovered through the courts, had made the money-lender more ready to lend. The process had gone on during the period of prosperity, and the cultivator was quite oblivious of where he was going, but as soon as the reaction came and the money-lender began to tighten his grip on the cultivator's land, his real position was brought home suddenly to the cultivator."⁵³ We have made this long quotation not only because it describes the position of the agriculturists very well, but also because it is very reminiscent of the situation, almost in its details, described by Bradley-Birt, S. C. Roy, and others with regard to the Santals, the Oraons, and the Mundas. And we venture to go a step further to suggest that the proverbial pessimism and fatalism of the Indian agriculturists is, in part at least, a cognate phenomenon to the "moral depression" sensed by Dr. Hutton, Mr. Elwin, and others among the so-called aborigines.

Sir Theodore Morison quotes the following remark made in 1869 by an observant officer: "The tendency of our rule has been greatly to increase the insecurity of the cultivator's tenure." Discussing the system of land-tenure he speaks of the evil results of unequal competition between the landlord and the tenant which "are not confined to the immediate sufferers, but are necessarily cumulative, and tend permanently to depress and degrade these classes of tenants, so that it is well-nigh impossible for their children ever to remedy their situation."⁵⁴ Russell and Hiralal have observed that the introduction of the English law of contract and transfer of property have worsened the character of the money-lending business by offering a new incentive to and reward for the successful money-lender. Their description of the transaction between the money-lending creditor and the cultivating debtor is worth perusal, as it reminds one of similar description of transactions among the so-called aborigines. They observe:

⁵³ Op. cit., pp. 29-30.

⁵⁴ "The Industrial Organization of an Indian Province," pp. 41, 60.

"The debtor signs a bond sometimes not even knowing the conditions, more often having heard them, but without any clear idea of their effect or the consequences to himself, and as readily allows it to be registered. When it comes into court, the witnesses, who are the money-lender's creatures, easily prove that it was a genuine and *bona fide* transaction, and the debtor is too ignorant and stupid to be able to show that he did not understand the bargain or that it was unconscionable. In any case the court has little or no power to go beyond a properly executed contract without any actual evidence of fraud, and has no option but to decree it in terms of the deed."⁵⁵ Dr. Vera Anstey quotes the following observation of B. A. Collins, showing the contrast between the pre-British and post-British relative positions of the money-lender and the cultivator. "The institution of Civil Government tends to act as an engine to deprive the cultivator of his holding, and of the profits of cultivation. The verbal contracts of the past and the easy relations with a hardly more literate money-lender have given way to a formal, though one-sided, account-keeping which tends to reduce the more important party to slavery and indigence."⁵⁶

The Indian landlord, in contrast to his confreres in the more progressive agricultural countries, is known to be more a rent-receiver than a person actively interested in agriculture.⁵⁷ The landlord, thus oriented, may employ lessees who generally are strangers to the tenants. In an early report on the settlement of the Moradabad district in the U. P. they are thus characterized: "They have not even the lingering spark of scruple which may sometimes have restrained the rapacity of their principals; they do not know, and they do not care to know, the people; and in their turn they work through a hired agent, with what results it is not difficult to guess." "The effect of this sort of treatment is to impoverish and depress the people."⁵⁸ Prof. Gadgil, writing about the conditions in the Deccan prevailing in the third quarter of the 19th century, tells us that the money-lenders, who were acquiring the

⁵⁵ "Tribes and Castes of the C. P.," Vol. II, pp. 131-133; Cf. "The Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India," p. 432.

⁵⁶ "The Economic Development of India," (3rd ed.), p. 186.

⁵⁷ P. P. Pillai: "Economic Conditions in India," p. 105.

⁵⁸ Quoted by Sir Theodore Morison, loc. cit., p. 59.

land of the local cultivators, belonged to the up-country Marwari class.⁵⁹ Russell and Hiralal observe that the money-lender in the Central Provinces is a member of a different caste and often of a different country from those of the cultivators and "has no fellow-feeling towards them; and therefore considers the transaction merely from the business point of view of getting as much profit as possible." He was mainly restrained in these activities by the fact that he was quite often a local resident, though not permanent, and as such was under some salutary influence of public opinion and fear for his own life. But with the rise of large banking houses and consequent use of agents, even this check disappeared. And the slight personal contact that could have existed between the money-lender, though coming from a distant town, and the local cultivator ceased entirely. "The agent looks mainly to his principal, and the latter has no interest in or regard for the cultivators of distant villages."⁶⁰ That this phenomenon of the creditor, having no communal relation with the local cultivator, is very widespread is clear from the following observation of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India: "That creditor is too often a landlord of a different-class who has no natural or historical connection with his estate and is only interested in the immediate exploitation of the property in his control."⁶¹

The operation of all the factors ushered in by the British rule, some directly, others indirectly, has led to a large number of the peasant class being reduced to virtual serfdom, toiling away on the land only to hand over the product of their industry to their creditors, who are the legal owners of the land, and piteously waiting for the creditor's gracious bounty to supply the daily needs of their families at the most to a miserable extent.⁶²

We have already referred to the position of artisans in certain crafts in connection with bonded labour obtaining among them. Some of them find themselves precisely in the same situation as the agriculturists *vis-a-vis* their creditors. Prof. Gadgil, describing the condition of weavers working on hand-loom in the period of about twenty years before the

⁵⁹ Op. cit., p. 30.

⁶⁰ Op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 129-31.

⁶¹ "Report," p. 433.

⁶² Theodore Morison, loc. cit., p. 104; Russell and Hiralal, loc. cit., II, p. 129; Gadgil, loc. cit., p. 30; Vera Anstey loc. cit., p. 186.

last war, points out how, while a large proportion of the weavers, working on a bare subsistence wage for the yarn dealer, managed to keep their wretched independence, others were too heavily indebted to the dealers to retain any independence whatever. They had to pledge their very means of production, the looms, and to work for the creditors on piece-work wages.⁶³

It must be clear from the above discussion that it has been the fate of a large number of rural workers, whether agriculturists or artisans, as a result of concatenation of various circumstances and forces that have appeared since the advent of British rule in India, to lose their very means of production, and thus to be reduced to the position of wage-earners at the mercy of a rather unsympathetic class of middlemen or even to that of serfs and helots. There is, therefore, nothing very peculiar to themselves in the identical condition of the so-called aborigines respecting the loss of their lands and the resultant loss of independence.

Honesty shown by the aborigines in their transactions has its counterpart among the cultivators in regard not only to the acknowledgment of debt but also to the utilization of certain provisions of the special legislation in order to escape easily from the debt. About the use of the facility provided in the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act for a cultivator to get himself declared insolvent under certain conditions, Prof. Gadgil observes: "It is a striking proof of the honesty of the peasant that this provision was very rarely resorted to."⁶⁴

The evils arising from the operation of some laws seem to have attracted the attention of the British administrators in India fairly early. Dr. Pillai thinks that the earliest attempt to remedy some of the evils were made after the pattern suggested in Mills' work, the Bengal Rent Act (x) of 1859 being the first of its kind.⁶⁵ Since then various laws were enacted in the different Provinces and by the Central Government to safeguard the interests of large landed estates and of tenants and landholders. Among other things legislation has sought (i) to prevent large landed estates of zamindars from passing into the hands of others through

⁶³ Op. cit., p. 181.

⁶⁴ Op. cit., p. 31.

⁶⁵ Op. cit., p. 103.

mismanagement, (ii) to secure the tenant in his tenure and the landholder in his land, and to prevent the land held by tenants or owned by landholders from passing into the hands of non-cultivating classes, and (iii) to prevent debts of agriculturists becoming excessive through high rates of interest and practice of chicanery.

In the first category of laws stand the Court of Wards Acts, the Taluqdar Acts, and the Encumbered Estates Acts. Of all the Acts enacted to protect the large landholder, the Ahmedabad Taluqdars Act of 1862 appears to be the oldest, antedating the first of such acts designed specially for the benefit of the so-called aborigines, the Chota Nagpur Encumbered Estates Act, by fourteen years. The Court of Wards Acts are rather wider in scope, but are intended to serve the same purpose.⁶⁶ The second set of laws seeks mainly to secure a tenant in the tenure of his land and a landholder from exploitation, and generally speaking to prevent land passing out of the hands of the cultivating classes. It comprises principally the Tenancy Acts, the Land Alienation Acts, and the Redemption of Mortgages Acts. Here and there, the same purpose is sought to be achieved through restricted tenures under the provisions of the Land Revenue Code. This type of legislation, except for the Bengal Tenancy Act, came into operation a little later among the non-aboriginal than among the aboriginal agriculturists. But once begun, it has gone on almost with unabating speed. The Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879 is generally considered to be the archetype of most of the legislation for the stabilization of the agriculturists. Its provisions appear to be comprehensive, even providing "a special machinery to render cheap and summary justice to the rayats." It made possible an investigation of transactions between the agriculturists and the creditors, and empowered the courts to so manage as to avoid the sale of land of the debtor. As a last resort it provided for insolvency being granted to the agriculturist.⁶⁷ Yet the main object of the Act is described to have been "to put the relations between agriculturists and money-lenders on a better footing."⁶⁸ Therefore the Bengal Tenancy Act of

⁶⁶ K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., pp. 6-8.

⁶⁷ K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 33.

⁶⁸ "Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India," p. 438.

1865, which was an amendment of the Tenancy Act of 1859, must be considered to be the earliest law safeguarding the interests of tenants in the lands held or occupied by them.⁶⁹ The Panjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, however, has been the charter of the small landholder and of the cultivating classes, as against the non-agriculturists, money-lenders, and others and it has inspired similar legislation in other Provinces.⁷⁰ The third group of laws is represented by the Agriculturists' Relief Acts, the Usurious Loans Act, the Debtors' Relief Acts, and the Money Lenders' Acts. The principal aim of these Acts has been to prevent unnecessary and excessive indebtedness among the agriculturists through, among various devices, regulating the rate of interest. Indirectly, of course, they are meant to prevent loss of land to the agriculturist-debtors. Laws in the second category, too, many times provide for the recognition of only a reasonable rate of interest.⁷¹ The Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act properly belongs to the third category of legislation. Prof. Gadgil observes: "Looked at retrospectively, the D. A. R. Act is in the main a rural Money Lenders' Act."⁷²

Protection through preventing high rates of interest being charged and through making difficult alienation of land in favour of creditors, money-lenders and non-cultivating classes is, at best, only negative or restrictive as long as the need for raising loans and other associated problems of agriculture remains as it is. Positive or constructive protection of agriculturists must attempt to solve their problem of getting easy credit to such an extent as is within their reasonable powers to bear the burden of, without taxing their capacity for suffering or production. Of the various methods of such positive or constructive protection, three have been so far attempted in India. First, the existing amount of debt, which is generally found to be depressingly heavy, must either be scaled down or liquidated. Leaving aside the early experiment in Bengal and the provisions of the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act, the first scheme of conciliation of debt was tried in the Central Provinces between 1897 and 1912. Many of

69 P. P. Pillai: "Economic Conditions in India," p. 108.

70 K. G. Sivaswamy, *loc. cit.*, pp. 52, 68.

71 *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 171-73.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

the laws classed in the third category above included provisions for conciliation and scaling down of debts. In addition, Debts Conciliation Acts, too, specially exist for this purpose.⁷³ Second, to provide easy credit and enable the agriculturists to tide over certain bad periods, co-operative movement and the land mortgage banks have been fostered since 1904.⁷⁴ Third, the State has taken up the positive duty and function of helping cultivators with the funds of the State under certain conditions. As early as 1793 Regulations were issued providing for *taccavi* advances for certain purposes. Under the Land Improvement Loans Act of 1883 and the Agriculturists' Loans Act of 1884, Local Governments can, and do, advance loans at reasonable or rather low rate of interest to the agriculturists either to carry out certain improvements to their lands or to tide over periods of distress or to purchase seed or cattle, etc.⁷⁵

It is seen from the above discussion that both legislation and practice in regard to the safeguarding of the interests of a large section of the non-aboriginal agricultural population are very similar to those described above in the history of the protection of the so-called aborigines. In the literature on the subject the cultivators are, more often than not, described as ignorant and improvident. The problem regarding land and its proper cultivation is very largely the same for a large section of our population, whether aboriginal or non-aboriginal. The bare truth is that there is a large section of our population deriving its subsistence from agricultural pursuits, which is exploited in various possible ways by money-lenders, would-be absentee landlords, rack-renters, and middlemen. All the people who are thus being exploited are really backward. And in the classification of the Education Departments of some Provinces, there figure in the category of backward people many more groups than the so-called aboriginal tribes, leaving aside the Scheduled or Depressed classes.

That the problems of some of the non-aboriginal people are more or less similar to those of the so-called aborigines is

⁷³ K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., pp. 226-227, 233-234.

⁷⁴ John Matthai: "Agricultural Co-operation in India," p. 3.

⁷⁵ "Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India," pp. 419, 427.

appreciated by some administrators, is clear from the grouping of the two together by the Bihar Government in showing the percentage of the advanced to the backward peoples in some of the districts in its proposal for treating them as partially excluded tracts. Mr. Tallent's observation, made in 1921, is clear on the point. He says: "What exactly is included in the depressed classes has never been stated, but the term would appear to include a wider range of castes and tribes than the untouchables. If it is taken to include the Hindu 'untouchables' *plus* the Animists *plus* the Hindu members of tribes which are largely Animistic, the total comes to about 10 millions or something less than a third of the population of the Province."⁷⁶ Mr. Lacey in 1931 cut out from Mr. Tallent's enumeration some of the untouchable castes and put the number, not of the depressed classes, but of the primitive and semi-primitive people, as roughly seven million or one-sixth of the provincial population.⁷⁷ The Bombay Government has been giving away some of the land at its disposal mostly to the members of the so-called aboriginal tribes, in the districts of Khandesh and Thana, and to some castes in Kanara under restricted tenure.⁷⁸ By 1928 about a million acres were held under this tenure "mostly by members of aboriginal tribes" in the presidency, and "about a million and a half acres in Sind."⁷⁹ The Starte Committee in 1930, finding that land was mainly granted to members of the aboriginal tribes, made a guarded suggestion: "We agree that they have a prior claim to such lands; at the same time we consider that some share of the land should be given to the Depressed Classes, as in many respects their need is greater than that of the aboriginal Tribes." The Committee suggested that the category of "Backward Classes" should be formed of three sub-sections, viz., The Depressed classes, the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes, and other Backward Classes, the last to include wandering tribes. According to the census of 1921 the Depressed Classes numbered about 15 lakhs, the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes a little over 13 lakhs, and the other Backward Classes about 10

76 "Census of India, 1921, Bihar and Orissa Report," p. 234.

77 "Census of India, 1931, Bihar and Orissa Report," p. 289.

78 K. G. Sivaswamy, loc. cit., p. 74.

79 "Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India," p. 421.

and a half lakhs. It proposed that ways and means to see that land which should, instead of being allowed to pass into the money-lenders or rich classes, "be secured to the the Backward Classes or other equally poor persons."⁸⁰ D. Symington suggests that *all* new land in certain areas should be reserved for members of the Backward Classes and should be granted to the non-aboriginals on equal terms with the aborigines. There is a considerable population, such as Malhari Kolis, Dhor Kolis, and Mahars, whose condition is similar to that of the so-called aborigines.⁸¹ Mr. Grigson, too, recognizes the similarity of the problems of the so-called aborigines and many other castes and tribes. Regarding the measures he suggests he remarks: "Nearly everything that I advocate for the Gond, the Korku, the Baiga, and the Bhil is necessary, if not always in the same degree, for all the castes and tribes of the backward areas, save in so far as, because of greater backwardness, inferior economic conditions or linguistic difficulties, there are problems peculiar to the 'aboriginal.'"⁸²

Some of the legislation enacted for the benefit of the non-aboriginal cultivators was framed on the model of similar legislation for the aborigines. On the other hand, as we have seen, fair protection was afforded to the Gonds, the Korkus, and other aborigines in the Central Provinces with the help of the laws designed for the use of the general body of the community. The main problem of the aborigines, therefore, is very similar to the problems of non-aboriginal agriculturists.

It is the problem of the ignorant and exploited people, who work on land and carry on cultivation for some time only to find sooner or later that their lands are no longer theirs. The result is brought about by a combination of many factors, viz., improvidence and ignorance of the people, passion for land and higher powers of intelligence, thrift and chicanery of the money-lending classes, and the rather complicated, costly, and inconvenient machinery of law.

80 "Report of the Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes Committee," 41-42, 9.

81 "Report on the Aboriginal and Hill Tribes of the Partially Excluded Areas in the Province of Bombay," pp. 8, 9, 29.

82 "The Aboriginal Problem in the Balaghat District," p. 49.

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